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'To Live is Not to Breathe; It is to Act'

—Rousseau

Dai Qing and her Notion of A Chinese Intellectual

BY CHENG LI

SHANGHAI, China

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Few writers, in China or elsewhere, in this or any other age, have had a more dramatic, or bizarre, political experience than Dai Qing (pronounced *dai ching*). A child of an anti-Japanese martyr, an adopted daughter of a Communist marshal, a Red Guard in the Cultural Revolution, an engineering student specializing in intercontinental ballistic missiles, an intelligence agent for the People's Liberation Army (PLA), a prominent investigative journalist, an activist in the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement, a political prisoner in China's maximum security jail, a spokesperson for environmental protection and other social movements in the country, Dai Qing undoubtedly has had an extraordinary career.

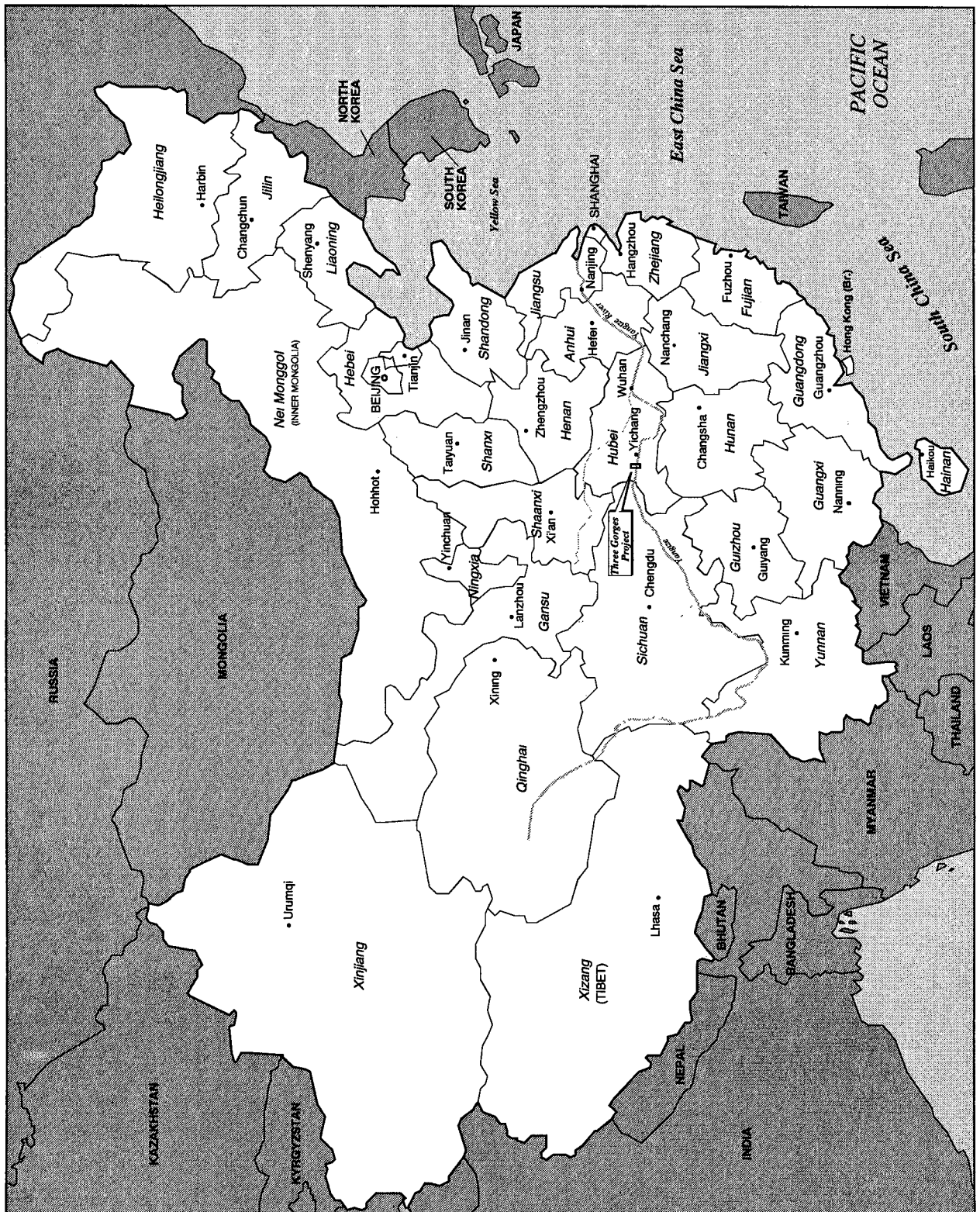
Even more extraordinary, however, is Dai's courageous character, her strong sense of social responsibility, and her thought-provoking ideas about China's future. After the Tiananmen massacre, many dissident intellectuals and student leaders escaped to foreign countries. The cultural attaché at the German Embassy in Beijing offered Dai the opportunity to go to Germany, presumably to take part in a cultural exchange program. But Dai told the German diplomat that as a public intellectual in China, she was concerned about something more important than her own safety.

When Dai was released after ten months of imprisonment without trial and was allowed to travel to the United States, two American lawyers asked Dai whether she would like to request political asylum or pursue permanent residence in the US. Dai responded that she enjoyed the intellectual freedom and material comforts in America, but as a writer with a focus on Chinese society, she should live in China and keep in touch with the Chinese people.

Dai's decision to remain in China, has embarrassed and angered both the Chinese government and dissident intellectuals exiled in Western countries. Chinese authorities prefer letting Dai stay abroad forever. Her presence in China represents potential trouble, a time bomb for the authoritarian regime. But authorities cannot find an excuse to expel or arrest her. For dissident intellectuals, however, the fact that Dai has continued her work in China makes them look like cowards and their exile status somehow unjustified.

While both the Chinese government and the overseas dissident movement try to limit her influence, Dai has continued to be active as a writer, as a government critic, and as a spokesperson for various social movements such as environmental protection, the preservation of

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indigenous culture and the independence of women.

An Independent Intellectual and A Woman of Action

Soon after she was released from jail in the spring of 1990, Dai started to work as Chief Editor of *ECHO*, a Chinese magazine focusing on the popular and indigenous cultures in mainland China and Taiwan. The main purpose of the journal has been to guard against the destructive impact of modernization upon folk customs and indigenous cultures in Chinese society.

Recently, Dai established a private data collection and translation center focusing on environmental issues in China. It collects information about environmental problems and protection in the country, translates the information into English, and sends it, through e-mail, to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world. The center also publishes a monthly journal, *Environmental Protection Digest*. Twenty issues have been published thus far. As one foreign journalist noted, the center itself plays the role of a genuine NGO in the country.

Dai's book *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, a critique of the massive Three Gorges Dam project on China's Yangtze River, which was banned by Chinese authorities after its release in 1989, was translated into English and published in 1994 (by both Probe International Publications and Earthscan Publications). In the first half of 1995, Hong Kong's Mingbao Press published Dai's three new books, including *My Life at the Qingcheng Prison*, a personal recollection of her experience in jail and a moral criticism of Communist authoritarian rule. All of these books became best-sellers in the Chinese speaking world outside Mainland China.

During the past few years, Dai frequently traveled abroad, giving talks in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other countries. Her topics ranged from "thought reform" in the Mao era to "economic reform" under Deng, from the anti-intellectualism in China during the early period of the Communist rule to the technocratic orientation of the new Chinese leadership, from a reexamination of the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement to the problems of Western misunderstanding of Chinese politics, from women's issues to the green movement.

Dai's contributions to Chinese society have gradually gained international recognition. *The Times of London*, *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Reader's Digest*

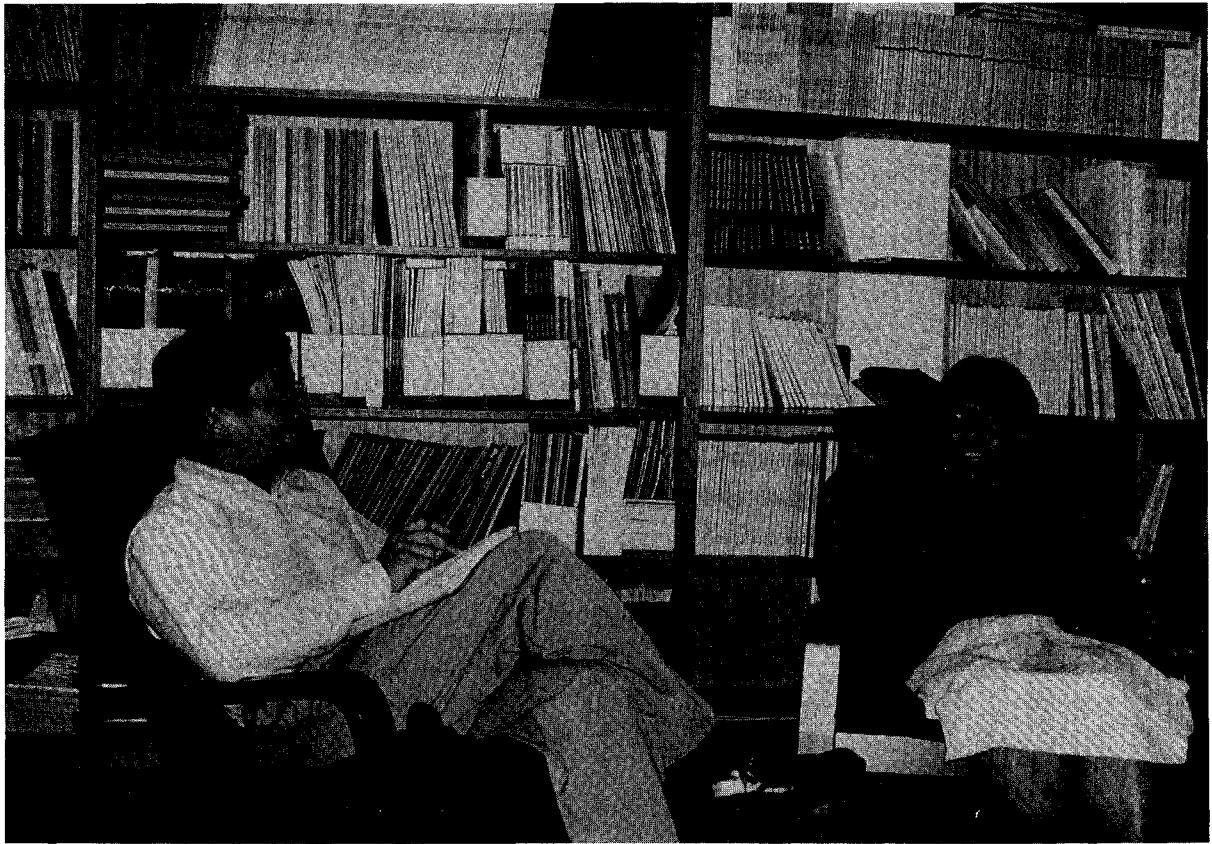


Dai Qing: A prominent woman intellectual and dissident who has been a spokesperson for various social movements in China.

and many other magazines interviewed her or published feature articles about her. Dai has also received numerous awards and fellowships such as the 1992 Golden Pen for Freedom (Prague), the 1993 Goldman Environment Award (San Francisco), the 1993 Conde Nast Environmental Award, Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University, Freedom Forum Fellowship at Columbia University, and Humanities Research Fellowship at the Australian National University.

I had never read her books before I started to work in China as an ICWA Fellow in fall 1993. Although all of her books are banned from publication or being reprinted in China today, those published prior to the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement, for example, *The Last Oval*, *Expel the Devil and Clasp Onto God*, *Oral History of Contemporary Chinese Women*, *Chu Anping and "Total Party Domination"*, *Out of the Modern Superstition* and *Conversation with Scholars*, are available in many public libraries in the country.

Most of her books are collections of non-fiction essays and reports. The stories in these collections show



Interview with Dai Qing at the Contemporary China Center of the Australian National University in February, 1995

why Dai Qing is celebrated. I was impressed by her sharp criticism of the establishment, her rich observation of Chinese characters, her capacity to analyze complicated socio-political issues in a simple-but-not-simplistic way, and her deep concern about the human condition in China and the world. Reading these books left me wondering — why isn't the author more famous?

I met Dai Qing earlier this year, when both of us were Visiting Fellows at the Contemporary China Center in Canberra, Australia. Dr. Jonathan Unger, Head of the Center, suggested that I write a report about Dai Qing for ICWA readers.

Dr. Unger even suggested a title: "Interview with Dai Qing — a Chinese Woman Intellectual."

I was excited by the idea of writing a report about Dai Qing. During my first year of fellowship in China, I had completed several intensive interviews with people in different occupations, e.g. a technocrat, a migrant worker, a peasant-turned-industrialist, and an urban private entrepreneur. But I had not written a story on a Chinese public intellectual — someone with a university degree who is engaged in public affairs.

It would be a good idea, I thought, to interview a Chinese intellectual and write an article about his or her perspective on the transformation of contemporary

China. There can be no deep understanding of Chinese society and politics without paying attention to intellectuals — men and women of ideas.

I had difficulty, however, finding the right person. Many intellectuals had been caught up in the rapid change of economic conditions in the country. The effort to survive financially kept them from engaging in serious intellectual endeavors. Some intellectuals were reluctant, for understandable reasons, to discuss sensitive political issues with a writer from the United States.

A friend of mine suggested that I interview a dissident intellectual in exile. But to be frank, I found most Chinese dissidents in exile to be political opportunists. Fang Lizhi, an astrophysicist who was known as "China's Sakharov" and Chai Ling, a student leader in the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement, for example, were considered in the West as heroes of China's democratic movement. But even before the government crackdown on June 4th, Fang went to the U.S. embassy with tears in eyes, and asked for political asylum. Chai was already hiding outside Beijing. These "spiritual leaders" of the "democratic movement" left thousands of protesters to encounter the tanks and machine guns of the Chinese army while they were hiding out or checking in at a foreign embassy.

Some well-known exiled politicians, Yan Jiaqi and

Chen Yizi, for example, had served as political advisors for Zhao Ziyang, former Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party. They were advocates for authoritarian rule while Zhao was in power. But after the Tiananmen incident, they claimed all of a sudden to be "long-time fighters against Communism and spokesmen for Chinese democracy." I felt that these dissidents could not honestly face their own past. In addition, they were out of touch with current Chinese society. A recent foreign visitor to China observed that people in China today display nothing but contempt for these dissidents.¹ I certainly would not waste my time listening to their nonsense.

Dai Qing, however, is quite different. In fact, unlike many exiled Chinese dissidents who had served as government officials, Dai has never held any official post in her life.

"The Chinese people like to mention one's *highest official post* in an obituary. The highest official post in my obituary will be," Dai Qing once said to me sarcastically, "no higher than the deputy team leader of the Young Pioneers [a children's organization in elementary schools]."

I found Dai to be much more honest about her past than those "Chinese democrats in exile." She does not deny her privileged Communist family background and political activities, including her experience as an intelligence agent for the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA). Dai, as some of her friends described her to me, is a writer not only willing to explore her own mistakes and weaknesses, but also dedicated to challenging her readers to see their own lives and worlds from new and different perspectives.²

Dai Qing seems to be an ideal person to interview on the subject of Chinese intellectuals. She is from a privileged Communist class background, but betrays and mercilessly denounces the Communist ruling class. She is both an intellectual with a sense of history and a vision of the future, and a woman of action who has her feet firmly planted on the ground of Chinese society. Dai Qing's experience not only reflects, but also affects in a profound way, China's political development.

From an Intelligence Agent to an Investigative Journalist

Dai Qing readily agreed to be interviewed. "But I don't think that you should call me 'an extraordinary woman,'" Dai corrected me when I referred to her in that way.

"I admit, however," Dai added, "that my political background is unique and my life up 'til now has been filled with dramatic tales."

Dai's life has surely been filled with dramatic changes. She was born in Chongqing, a southwestern city of China, during the anti-Japanese war. Her father,

an intellectual who received a university education in Moscow in the early 1920s, was a member of the first generation of Chinese Communists. Her mother, who was born into a well-known scholar's family in Peking at the end of the Qing Dynasty, once studied in Japan where she became interested in the Communist movement.

Her parents married at the liaison office of the Chinese Communist Party in Chongqing, capital of the Nationalist government during World War II. As intelligence agents for the Far East Division of Communist International (CI), her parents were sent by CI to their home city, Peking, which was then under Japanese occupation. They were later arrested by the Japanese and her father was executed when Dai Qing was three years old.

Dai was adopted by Ye Jianying, a Communist marshal who later became Chairman of China's People's Congress and one of the most powerful figures in the country in the late 1970s. Dai grew up a privileged member of the Communist ruling class. She entered a public middle school in Beijing, which had previously been a religious boarding school. Even under Communist control, this school emphasized aesthetics and a liberal arts education. As Dai later recalled, humanitarianism and the liberal arts education that she received then had a strong impact on her. In her years at middle school, Dai became interested in literature, especially British and French literature.

But, like many other children of high-ranking officials, Dai did not choose to study humanities in college. Instead, in 1960, she entered the Haerbin Institute of Military Engineering, one of the most prestigious and elite universities in the country, studying the automatic control system of intercontinental ballistic missiles. Soon after her graduation, the Cultural Revolution took place and she joined the Red Guards. When the Red Guards' movement declined, Dai was sent to the countryside in Guangdong Province and then Hunan Province to work as a farm laborer. In the early 1970s, Dai returned to Beijing to work as a technician in a factory run by the public security department. This factory specialized in surveillance and other technical equipment.

After the Cultural Revolution, Dai attended the PLA Institute of Foreign Languages to study English. While in the language program, Dai was recruited into the Chinese army's intelligence service.³ In her spare time during these years, Dai started to write and publish short stories and soon became an eminent young novelist. Because of her training in foreign languages and her talent in literature, Dai was assigned by the PLA to the Chinese Writers' Association as a full-time interpreter and part-time spy. Her task was to make foreign contacts and to keep watch on the international exchange program of the association.

Because a male colleague of hers in the PLA intelligence service divulged a list of personnel to a young



Dai Qing and her adopted father Marshal Ye Jiaoping in the early 1980s when Dai worked in army intelligence and Ye was Chairman of China's People's Congress.

lady in the CIA, Dai and her other colleagues had to give up intelligence work. In 1982, Dai left the PLA and worked as a journalist for *Guangming Daily*, a leading national newspaper whose readers were mainly intellectuals.

During her seven years' tenure at the newspaper, Dai became the country's best-known woman journalist and one of the boldest investigative reporters in the history of the People's Republic of China. She traveled all over the country and reported on many extremely sensitive political issues.

- In 1985, for example, Dai went to Guangxi Province, in southern China, to report on the Sino-Vietnamese war. As she interviewed Chinese soldiers at the China-Vietnam border, Dai found that, in con-

trast to the government's propaganda, the army's morale was very low. Chinese soldiers complained that the authorities did not value their lives at all. Dai did not write the reports that authorities expected. Instead, she wrote two articles — one satirizing the foolishness of the war and the other challenging the government's decision to go to war. Both articles were banned from circulation. Because of her disobedience, Dai lost her chance for promotion at the newspaper.

- In 1987, Dai went to Heilongjiang Province, in northeastern China, to cover stories on the prolonged forest fire in the region. Dai and several other Chinese journalists wrote eye-witness reports displaying how human error — the authorities' disdain for human life and lack of environmental concern — led to the months-long forest fire. Because of the political sensi-

While working for Guangming Daily, Dai started her own column on "Conversation with Scholars."

From 1986 to 1988, several dozen interviews by Dai were published in the newspaper. These reports covered some important and politically sensitive issues in the country, reflecting the critical view of Chinese intellectuals.

She is shown interviewing Feng Youlan, a well-known Chinese historian, in 1986.



tivity of these reports, the authors could not publish them in the newspapers and journals for which they worked. Dai Qing therefore edited and published these reports as a monograph, which had an unusual and revealing title *! and ?*. This was the first time in PRC history that Chinese journalists had a “horizontal coalition” (*hengxiang jiehe*) to enable them to voice dissent.

- In 1989, prior to a scheduled People’s Congress special meeting on the proposed Three Gorges dam project on the Yangtze River, Dai compiled and published a collection of interviews with, essays on and statements by China’s public intellectuals, scientists and journalists who opposed the dam project. The publication of this collection, as the Hong Kong journal *Far East Economic Review* noted, marked a watershed event, as it represented the first time in PRC history that ordinary Chinese people decided not to keep silent about a massive project that would profoundly affect their lives.

Because of the Tiananmen event in 1989, the People’s Congress postponed the meeting on the proposed dam project. In April 1992, when the National People’s Congress convened to vote for the construction of the Dam, 177 deputies voted against the project and another 664 deputies abstained. This meant that a third of the Congress had reservations about the dam project proposed by the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council. In the People’s Republic of China, deputies of the Congress are supposed to unanimously support any proposal by the Party. It was the first time in the history of the Congress that so many deputies voted against a proposal by the authorities. Dai’s book certainly made the deputies more aware of the problems involved in the dam project.

All these journalistic activities by Dai Qing are truly remarkable if one considers the Chinese authorities’ firm control over mass media in the country. It is incredible that Dai alone covered so many important issues and voiced her dissent on major government policies. Many people believe that Dai’s background as an adopted daughter of Marshal Ye Jianying protected her. But according to Dai, when she started her writing career Marshal Ye had already left the center of power and soon died. When Dai became an investigative journalist and published some controversial reports in the mid-1980s, she had already split off from the power circle.

It was courage, not family background, as some foreign observers said, that distinguished Dai Qing from many other public intellectuals in China. Dai’s courage was evident because she was constantly under the threat of being expelled from her journalistic job.

“Everywhere in the world, including Western democratic countries,” Dai said to me, “investigative journalists are often faced with threats. But in democratic countries, freedom of the press is legally protected. Chinese journalists do not have legal protection. From the first day of my employment at *Guangming Daily* to



Dai Qing speaks at a news conference on the debate on the Three Gorges Dam project of the Yangtze River in 1989.

the day that I was forced to leave the newspaper, I had to constantly struggle for, through both words and deeds, the independence of journalism and freedom of the press in China.

“The Chinese Communist Party considers journalism ‘a mouthpiece of the Party,’” Dai explained, “so the main task for Chinese journalists is to propagate the Party line. I told my boss at *Guangming Daily* on the first day I worked there that I had a special request—I would refuse any assignment to report on a Party meeting. In a country where all major policies are already made by a small number of leaders before being presented at a meeting for discussion, it is a waste of time to report on any official meeting. My boss actually accepted my request, although he could not figure out why I would not accept this kind of ‘hot’ assignment.”

Since the mid-1980s, Dai Qing has more openly expressed the need for freedom of the press in China. Dai wrote many articles on this subject in various newspapers in the country, e.g. *The World Economic Herald*, a liberal newspaper in Shanghai. During the 1989 Tiananmen rally, Dai not only participated in the protest movement, but also played the role of a mediator between students and the government, trying to persuade student protesters to leave Tiananmen and calling on Chinese authorities not to crack down on students by force. When she found that the mass protest movement was being used by politicians, both old and young, to advance their power interests, she withdrew from the movement. On the day that authorities used violence to crack down on protesters, Dai quit the Chinese Communist Party.

“It was emotionally a tough decision for me,” Dai Qing said. “My life up ‘til then had been really tied to the Chinese Communist Party in a hundred and one ways. My father gave his life to the Party when his three children were only three, one year-old and an unborn baby respectively. My mother escaped execution because of her pregnancy. Also as a devoted CCP member, my mother was so infatuated with the Communist revolution that she cared more about the affairs

of the Party than her children. I grew up as a daughter of the Party."

"Does your decision suggest that as an insider of the CCP power circle, you had a better understanding of the problems and the loss of the 'mandate of heaven' of the Chinese Communist Party?" I asked.

"Yes," Dai replied, "but this was only part of the reason. Although I grew up under the influence of Communist doctrines, I became interested in Western literature at an early age. Humanism, which is immensely reflected in Western literature such as Dickens', Hugo's, Singer's and Bellow's works, had a strong impact on me.

"More importantly," she said, "my job as a journalist gave me a great opportunity to understand the lives of ordinary people — their hardships, vulnerability and frustrations. Meanwhile, I observed how the Communist Party fabricated history and fooled the people. Over the years, I came to realize that my journalistic integrity and the CCP doctrines were as incompatible as fire and water. My loyalty to, my trust in and, indeed, my illusions about the Party were completely destroyed after the 1989 Tiananmen event."

The Lessons of Tiananmen and the Problems of Chinese Intellectuals

It happened to be the sixth anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre when I saw Dai Qing again to continue my interview. This time I saw Dai at her apartment near Beijing University. Four policemen stayed outside her apartment building day and night to keep watch on her. Foreigners were not allowed to enter the apartment building. Chinese authorities were obviously very sensitive to the activities of dissident intellectuals like Dai during this "eventful period of the year."

"Do these policemen outside the apartment bother you?" I asked.

"No, not really," Dai said, "I and my family are already used to this kind of 'protection.' I sometimes even make fun of these policemen. Yesterday morning, my neighbors and I saw these policemen arranging their 'lookout spot' using a broken van outside my apartment building. One policeman asked me, 'You will not go out today, will you?' 'I will not go too far away,' I responded, 'probably only to Beijing University to inflame students.' At first all the policemen were shocked and then they laughed as they realized that I was just kidding. But anyway, they said they would report to top leaders in Beijing immediately."

"The Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party probably called an emergency meeting because of your joke," I said, laughing.

Chinese authorities, however, might have reason to be cautious. Beijing residents' resentment against cor-

ruption is much stronger now than it was even six years ago. Zhou Guanwu, a close friend of Deng Xiaoping and the head of the Beijing Steel Co., one of the largest enterprises in China, has been forced to resign. Zhou's son, a rich bureaucrat who was sent by the Beijing Steel Co. to Hong Kong as Chief Representative, has been called back and arrested. Wang Baosen, Vice Mayor of Beijing in charge of foreign investment in the city, committed suicide because of the scandal caused by his embezzlement of \$20 million. His boss, Chen Xitong, a Politburo member and Party Secretary of Beijing, has also been in trouble. Chen was a notorious Communist hardliner during the Tiananmen Massacre.

Meanwhile, about forty prominent Chinese intellectuals had just signed an open letter to Jiang Zemin, Deng's appointed successor, suggesting a more serious effort to punish corrupt high-ranking officials and asking Jiang to release all political prisoners in the country.

"Are you among the intellectuals who signed the open letter?" I asked.

"No," she replied.

"Why?"

"I have mixed feelings about what is happening in Beijing," Dai said. "On one hand I am thrilled to see these corrupt officials step down; on the other I felt disappointed with my colleagues, or so-called dissident intellectuals. It seems to me that they are doing exactly the same thing that they did six years ago. As you know, during the 1989 protest movement, students had a hunger strike and prominent intellectuals signed the petition. Protesters at Tiananmen thought that they were able to achieve their objectives because of the conflict among the Chinese leadership and the weakness of authorities. Top politicians in the country, however, also wanted to use the protest movement to advance their own political interests."

Dai raised her tone for emphasis. "Six years have passed (*liou nian le*) since the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement, but my colleagues seem not to have learned any lessons from the movement. This time, again, they think that they can take the advantage of the ongoing power struggle in the center and make democratic progress in the country. But actually, at most they are only the tools of politicians in the center."

"But they have some specific political demands this time, haven't they?" I said.

"Yes," Dai replied. "In an open letter, these intellectuals appealed to Jiang Zemin to solve the problem of official corruption and to constrain the growing power of the children of revolutionary veterans. But anyone who has a basic knowledge of Chinese politics should realize that no individual — Jiang Zemin, Qiao Shi or anyone else — can solve the problem of official corrup-

tion today. This is a problem that is deeply rooted in the political and socio-economic conditions of the country at present. In my view, these intellectuals can achieve nothing except attracting attention from foreign media."

"In retrospect," I said, "what are the lessons that the Chinese people, especially Chinese intellectuals, can draw from the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement?"

"Almost all the forces involved in the event made serious mistakes. Deng Xiaoping made the most obvious mistake by readily adopting violent means to deal with the crisis. Foreign journalists — most of whom had just arrived in China to report on Gorbachev's visit — also played a negative role in the event. These foreign journalists 'made a stormy sea stormier.' Their ignorance about Chinese politics and society, their simplistic dichotomy in portraying good guys and bad guys, their impatience toward the transformation of the Chinese communist regime, and their journalistic interest in sensational stories all led them to push both sides — the Chinese government and student protesters — to extremes. Meanwhile, student protesters at Tiananmen were led by nothing but their emotions. They did not know how to achieve their objectives. More precisely, they did not even know what their objectives were."

"Did these mistakes have an equal effect on the course of this tragic event?" I asked.

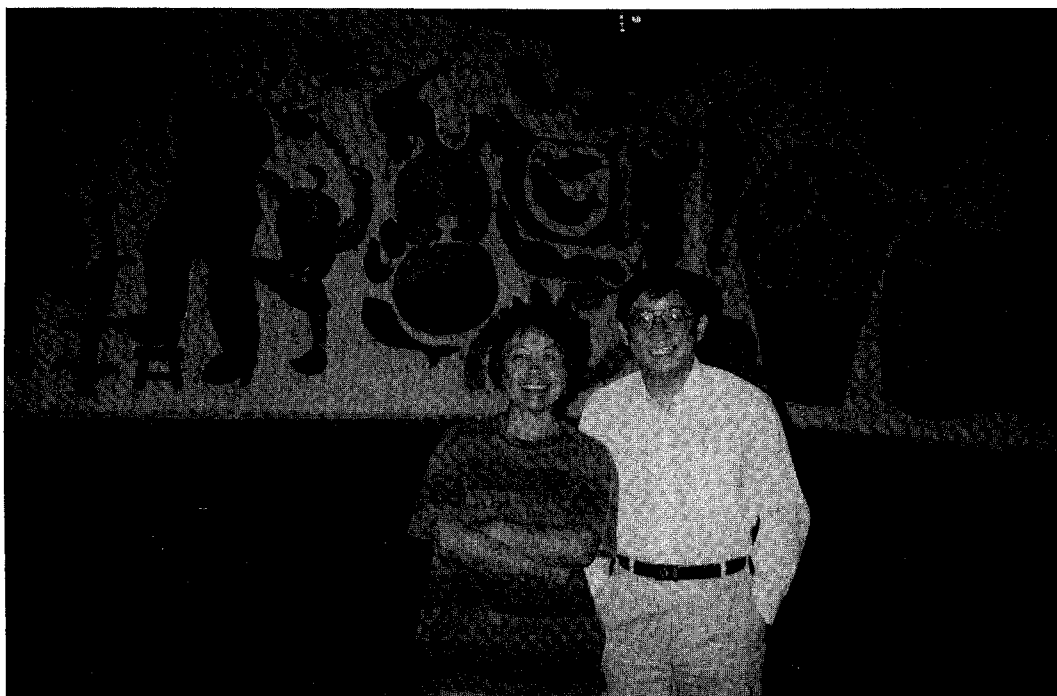
"No," said Dai quickly. "I believe that the most serious problem lay in ourselves, I mean China's public in-

tellectuals. We Chinese intellectuals as a whole should have taken the main responsibility for the tragic result of the Tiananmen incident."

I asked her to elaborate.

"To give you a better answer," Dai said, "let's see what the 1989 Tiananmen movement really was. People in both China and abroad often identify the Tiananmen rally as a democratic movement, a cultural movement similar to China's May 4th Movement in 1919, or a social movement with concrete objectives from which certain social groups could benefit. I believe that the 1989 Tiananmen movement was none of these. First, it was a big mistake to identify the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement as a democratic movement. Public intellectuals actually disseminated a lot of *demagogic noise* rather than *democratic values*."

I agree with Dai. Soon after the Tiananmen incident, my teacher at Princeton, Professor Lynn White, and I published an article in the journal *Modern China*, criticizing the common wisdom in the West about the nature and characteristics of China's 1989 protest movement.⁴ We noticed that the political demands from Tiananmen were generally not structural. They were often presented in emotional words and through traditional petitions, not through means that would assure more permanent benefits for social groups, nor translate into specific calls for broad electoral and other democratic procedures. Constitution-makers were noticeably scarce in 1989 Beijing. It was interesting for me to hear a similar evaluation from Dai, one of the most important participants in the movement.



Dai Qing and the author in a restaurant near Beijing University on June 1995, the 6th anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre.

"Secondly," Dai continued, "intellectuals and students in the movement claimed that they were inspired by the May 4th Movement, an anti-feudal and new cultural movement led by intellectuals during the second decade of this century. Protesters in Tiananmen identified themselves as spiritual successors of the May 4th Movement. But public intellectuals in 1989 interpreted the nature of the May 4th movement in the same way as Chinese Communists did. They appealed for revolutionary change and violent confrontation (*gemin he douzhen*)."

"People in the West," I commented, "overlooked the fact that some protesters were also prone to violent confrontation."

"Yes," Dai said. "The readiness for violent confrontation deviated from the main characteristic of the May 4th Movement, which emphasized a fundamental cultural change through evolutionary means. China's public intellectuals, with few exceptions, neither wanted to seriously reexamine Chinese culture and reject its negative aspects, nor really study the essence of Western democracies. For over seven decades since the May 4th Movement, public intellectuals were still eager for quick success and were more interested in the transition of political power and other superficial changes in the country. The motivation of many dissident intellectuals at Tiananmen was nothing more than to become revolutionary leaders like their Communist predecessors. In my view, Chinese intellectuals' effort to change China's political system without a change in Chinese political culture was doomed to fail."

"Thirdly," she said, "China's 1989 Tiananmen movement was not a social movement, but only a political movement, or even simply a political event."

I asked Dai to distinguish between a social movement and a political movement.

"The difference," Dai explained, "is in the objectives of the movements. A political movement is power-oriented. The objective of a political movement is usually to replace a government or one group of ruling elite by another. A social movement, by contrast, aims to achieve some concrete objectives for certain social groups. An environmental movement, for example, aims to maintain ecological balance."

"As a political movement, the best possible consequence from Tiananmen in 1989 would be that a group of more 'liberal' and popular elites won over conservative hardliners. Some dissident intellectuals such as Yan Jiaqi and Chen Yizi would probably join Zhao Zhiyang's new cabinet if protesters in Tiananmen had kicked Li Peng and other hardliners out of power. But I doubt this kind of change would affect, in a fundamental way, China's political system and Chinese society."

"The most important lesson that we can learn from the 1989 Tiananmen incident," Dai concluded, "is that

Chinese intellectuals should be more conscious of their intellectual integrity and dignity (*zhishi fenzi de duli renge*). In traditional China, intellectuals generally attached themselves to 'bigwigs' (*quanguai*), especially to political power. This tradition continued in the Mao era. Although intellectuals occasionally played the role of criticizing political authorities, this role was often restricted for three reasons. First, authorities did not tolerate criticism from intellectuals. Second, intellectuals financially depended on the Communist Party-State. And third, some intellectuals were interested in power and they became political elites in the Party."

"These three factors still exist, don't they?" I asked.

"Yes," Dai said, "but to a far lesser degree today. The capacity of the Communist State to control society has significantly declined. Intellectuals are not necessarily employed by the State. They can work for the private sector or even be self-employed. Of course, there will always be some intellectuals who have personal ambition for power and who are willing to sacrifice intellectual integrity and dignity to promote their own careers. But only short-sighted intellectuals believe that the Communist Party will run China forever."

"How can Chinese intellectuals make progress and improvement as a social group?" I asked.

"I think that Chinese intellectuals should do more down-to-earth kinds of work. Individually, each intellectual should first fulfill his or her professional role in society. If you are a journalist, you should seek truth; if you are a lawyer, you should fight for justice; if you are a scientist, you should oppose environmentally catastrophic projects such as the construction of Three Gorges Dam; if you are a teacher, you should advocate freedom and democratic values to your students."

"What about the collective role of public intellectuals?"

"As a social group," Dai replied, "intellectuals should make efforts to study the political procedures and structural measures of Western democracies, to disseminate democratic values in society through all means, to reexamine and renew Chinese culture, and most importantly, to more actively participate in various social movements."

"Are these the tasks that you have been performing in recent years?" I asked.

"Yes," said Dai. "What an individual intellectual can do is always limited, but I want to try my best to do some concrete work that I am familiar with. Currently, I have been engaged in several book-length projects, for example, biographical studies of some distinguished public intellectuals in contemporary China. I hope that the courage, integrity and scholarship of older generations of Chinese intellectuals will serve as role models, inspiring younger generations."

The Independence of Women and Women's Organizations

"As a distinguished woman intellectual writing about social issues" I said to Dai, "you have also served as a role model for Chinese women, especially for women intellectuals."

"A role model? No!" Dai laughed. "The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) has long considered me a trouble maker, a bad example for Chinese women."

"But you were elected a delegate to the All-China Women's Federation Conference in 1988?" I asked.

"Yes, I was," Dai said. "It was during that conference that I confronted the All-China Women's Federation and its chairperson."

I asked Dai to tell the story.

"The All-China Women's Federation," Dai said, "like many other national organizations in China, serves as a tool for the Communist authorities instead of representing the interests of Chinese women. Not surprisingly, this conference did not have any substantial discussion of serious issues such as discrimination against women in employment and education, the loss of social welfare for women, sexual harassment in the work place, the increase of child laborers and child prostitution, and the reemergence of concubinage. Instead, almost all the conference documents were about how the Chinese Communist Party was deeply concerned about women, how Chinese women were grateful to the Party, and how the delegates of the conference were thrilled to meet top leaders.

"The All-China Women's Federation Conference," Dai continued, "attempted to accomplish nothing but a big show. Everything was already decided by the Communist authorities before the meeting. I was particularly disappointed with the leaders of the federation. Chen Muhua, Chairwoman designate of ACWF [nominated by the Party], for example, was so sure that she would be elected that she did not even bother to attend the group discussion of the conference to meet with delegates. Instead, she went to play golf."

"In China," I said, "the admission fee to a golf course costs a senior professor two months' salary."

"Yes," Dai responded, "but more importantly, the money was not from her own pocket, but from public funds."

Chen Muhua, the highest-ranking woman politician in China, does not have a good reputation. In the late 1980s, when she traveled to a Western country, she used the whole chartered plane to transport furniture for her family. On another occasion during her travel abroad, she refused to take a seriously sick athlete back to China in her chartered plane. It is said that the ath-

lete died because of improper treatment.

"On the final day of the conference," Dai continued, "when delegates were about to vote for the executive members and chair of ACWF, I raised my hand. The executive chair of the conference had probably never expected that someone among the delegates would raise her hand before voting, although any delegate had the right to do so. The chair asked me, 'What's wrong with you?'"

"Did she really say this?" I said.

"Yes," Dai explained. "For any election in the People's Republic of China, delegates would routinely check their ballots or would unanimously raise their hands during the vote, but not prior to the vote. A delegate who eagerly raised a hand prior to the vote therefore must have had something wrong — maybe a personal emergency."

"I told the chair that I wanted to have a microphone to ask a few questions. The chair said 'OK' but I had to go to the platform to use the microphone there. It was unheard of that any delegates would want to use a microphone at their seats. The chair asked me what questions I wanted to ask. I said that as a delegate I would like to ask Chen Muhua two questions before voting."

"Did the chair allow you to speak?" I asked.

"The chair talked to Chen for a few minutes and then said that the conference did not have a session for questions and answers. She was afraid that if more delegates wanted to ask questions, the conference 'would not move smoothly and successfully.' I immediately responded that I could not understand why democratic practice would prevent the 'complete success' of the conference."

"How did other delegates in the conference react to your confrontation?" I asked.

"When I spoke, I received applause from a small number of delegates. But a majority of delegates seemed not to support me. For many delegates, to attend this national women's conference was a good opportunity to advance their future political careers. They might think that I was foolish because I ruined my career by challenging the leadership of ACWF. Some delegates even yelled, 'Get off the platform!' 'Don't answer her questions!' 'We don't have any question!' When my request for asking questions was finally denied, most delegates in the hall even started to sing songs. My effort to exercise democratic rights at China's national conference for women completely failed."

"What were the two questions that you planned to ask?"

"First, I wanted to ask Ms. Chen how she could



Dai Qing at the national women's conference in 1988. Dai was waiting for the decision from the organizers of the national women's conference whether she, as a delegate, could ask the chairperson-designate of the All-China Women's Federation a couple of questions.

persuade us to vote for her since her previous administrative performances were very disappointing. During the years when she was Minister of Foreign Trade, China had large deficits in foreign trade. During her tenure as President of the Peoples' Bank of China, the inflation rate was much higher than bank savings rates in the country. Now Chen was nominated to be the chair of the All-China Women's Federation, but as far as I knew, she had never written any articles or delivered any speeches on women's issues. There was no evidence indicating that she had a good understanding of the problems concerning Chinese women. I wanted to give her a chance to explain why she would not perform as poorly in her new post as she had in her two previous posts. Secondly, I was about to ask her to explain why she refused to take the sick athlete in her chartered plane."

"It would have been really exciting," I said, "to see how she would respond to these questions."

"Delegates at the conference, however, never knew what my questions were," Dai said. "I did give these

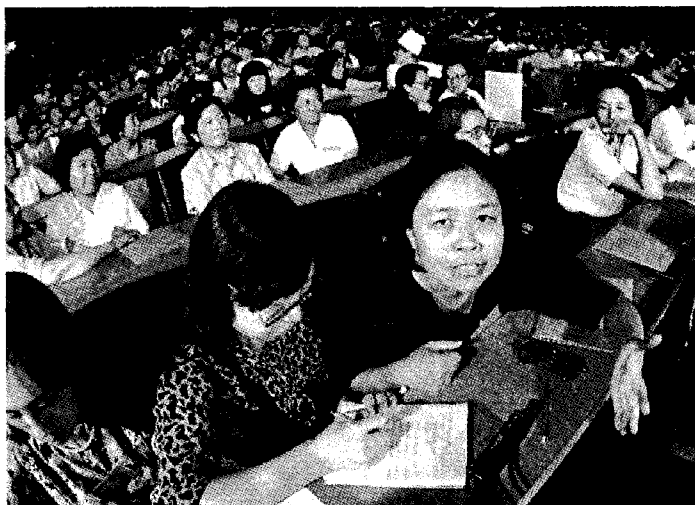
two questions to Chinese journalists who covered the conference. But no newspaper or magazine in China ever released them. This shows the strict control of the Chinese Communist Party over the mass media. Chen Muhua, of course, was elected to be Chair of ACWF, although she lost 40 votes out of a total of 300 voting members."

Chen still holds the highest position in ACWF. She is also the chair of the Chinese delegates selected to attend the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995.

"We are going to see another big show, aren't we?" I said.

"Yes," said Dai. "The Chinese authorities have no idea about the women's movement in the world. They are hosting this conference mainly to enhance China's status and improve its image in global affairs. Since Beijing was selected to host both the 4th World Conference on Women and the parallel meeting of Non-governmental Organizations, hundreds of 'non-governmental'

As her request to question the top leader of China's women's organization was denied, Dai was interviewed by the journalists who covered the conference.



women's organizations have been established in China. But I call them 'GONGOs' (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations).

"To improve China's image in women's affairs, the Chinese authorities have lately appointed more women to leadership posts in the country," Dai continued. "But what good is it if the Central Committee of the CCP has 20 percent female members instead of 10 percent? These women members still do not speak for women. Those who are selected to leadership posts are usually the women who fawn on authorities. Chen Muhua's qualification to be the chair of ACWF, for example, is simply the fact that she is a woman among the Communist top leaders and she would always say 'yes' to her male bosses in the party."

"What will be the most important step for Chinese women if they want to join the international women's movement?" I asked.

"We should realize the awakening of women's consciousness as individuals and independence as a social group," Dai replied. "In a country where the women's organizations are supposed to be the tool of political authorities, one cannot really expect that these organizations would defend the interests of women, nor can we make genuine progress for equality between men and women."

I agree with Dai. The lack of independence has prevented women's organizations from playing an important role in the country at the time of rapid socio-economic change. Economic reform in the Deng era has had a strong impact on family, marriage, and social norms. According to a Shanghai newspaper, during the past three years about 300 women in Shanghai asked women's organizations for help because they were suffering from domestic violence. But in most of these cases, they did not get much help, and their husbands continued to torture them.⁵ Meanwhile, China had about 909,000 divorces last year, three times the figure in 1991.⁶

In 1994, China's public security reported 143,000 cases of prostitution, involving about 288,000 people. The police closed 4,917 places of prostitution and arrested about 29,000 people.⁷ The Chinese government recently admitted that local police bureaus usually punish or arrest only those people without official backgrounds. Those who have high-ranking official status or who have connections with public security are often the main customers and patrons of sex industries in China. These people are often free from any punishment.

The Crucial Role of Intellectuals in the Ongoing Transformation of China

"In a way, the problems of Chinese women are similar to the problems of Chinese intellectuals — the lack of a concept of independence," Dai said. "The Chinese

people always attribute China's political problems to rigid authoritarian rule. But a deep-rooted cause probably lies in Chinese cultural values — in people's minds. The rigid authoritarian system has spawned people with subservient personalities. People with subservient personalities, in turn, help to consolidate rigid authoritarian rule."

"How can the Chinese people break out of this 'vicious circle'?" I asked.

"Some of my friends," Dai answered, "write many lengthy books on this subject and make the issue more complicated than it is. I think that, because of foreign interventions and civil wars over the past hundred years, China has lagged far behind developed countries. The explosion in population and the degradation of natural resources in the country have also aggravated China's problems. Chinese intellectuals should recognize the backwardness, both in the country and within themselves. They should catch up and lead China to join the world community for peace and development."

"Why do you single out intellectuals among various social groups in China?"

"China is undergoing rapid socio-economic change," Dai explained. "Chinese politicians, however, are not clear about what economic system China should establish, how far the Chinese political reform should go, and what role China should play in international affairs. Intellectuals can play a crucial role by providing a vision for China's future. Recently, people in the West have become concerned about the 'China threat.' For the West, both a strong authoritarian China and a weak disintegrated China can cause a lot of trouble in the world. In my view, this dilemma can be solved only when a majority of Chinese intellectuals become mature, independent, pro-democracy and pro-world peace."

I'm not sure whether Dai overemphasizes the role of intellectuals in the ongoing transformation of China. At present, both Chinese authorities and Western China watchers seem to pay more attention to other social groups in the country than to intellectuals. No one will fail to see the increasingly important role of new social groups in Chinese society, e.g. dissatisfied workers in the troubled State-owned enterprises, urban unemployed people, rural surplus laborers, migrants across the country, rural industrialists, urban entrepreneurs in private enterprises, bureaucratic capitalists in the State sector, and technocrats in government. In contrast to the late 1980s, when Chinese intellectuals and students were in the limelight, today intellectuals seem to be marginalized to the edges of society.

Yet, I found Dai Qing's perspective on intellectuals revealing and her own political experience inspiring. Theodore Draper, an American scholar who studied intellectuals and politics, once made the following re-

mark about intellectuals in Western societies:⁸

They [intellectuals] are not to be trusted as much as before, but society and government are likely to be just as dependent on them in the foreseeable future. The reason is that the intellectuals are but the most articulate, self-conscious repositories of the accumulated learning and experience of a society. If the intellectuals are in trouble, they are not the only ones; the society is in trouble.

This remark seems to be relevant to what has happened in China during the past decade. Dai Qing's perception of the important role of intellectuals in Chinese society also echoes Draper.

In many aspects, Dai Qing's political experience is unique and her character extraordinary. Yet, as Dai told me a few times, she is an ordinary Chinese woman and an ordinary Chinese intellectual. Her personal experience often reflects major political events and broad social changes in the country. Her courage, her self-criticism of past mistakes, her strong belief in intellectual freedom, and her remarkable contributions to various social movements all suggest the regeneration and the new search of Chinese intellectuals.

* * * * *

My interview with Dai Qing in her Beijing apartment was constantly interrupted by telephone calls. Apparently, Dai was very busy with social contacts.

"I don't have a regular job," Dai told me. "In official terms, I am unemployed. But I have a full working

schedule filled with interviews, meetings, traveling, reading and writing." She told me that she had several appointments after our interview that morning. In the summer, she planned to travel to the Yunnan Minorities Autonomous Region, in southern China, to do research and interviews for a book that she has been writing.

"The book," Dai told me, "is about how to resolve religious and nationalistic conflicts through compromise and negotiation. I believe that this is one of the most important issues facing the post-Cold War world."

"Will the policemen outside your apartment follow you while you are traveling?" I asked.

"I don't know and I don't care," Dai replied. "I have been enjoying my work. I cannot afford to be distracted because of the harassment of political authorities.

"To live is not to breathe; it is to act." Dai concluded our meeting with a quote from Rousseau.

"To live is not to breathe; it is to act." Does this quote tell us, better than any other words, the character and experience of Dai Qing — an "ordinary" Chinese woman intellectual who has many extraordinary accomplishments? If more Chinese intellectuals perceive their role in the same way as Dai does, what changes will they bring to China's political system and Chinese society in the years to come? □

NOTES:

1. Timothy Tung, "Changing China, A Personal Observation," *US-China Review*, Summer 1993, p. 13.
2. Geremie Barmé, a China expert from the Australian National University, is working on a book about Dai Qing. For his previous writing on Dai Qing, see "Using the Past to Save the Present: Dai Qing's Historiographical Dissent," *East Asian History*, Vol. 1, June 1991, pp. 141-181.
3. Dai Qing, "Wode jiandie shengya" (My spy career), in Dai Qing, *Wode shige huqing* (My four fathers), Hong Kong: Mingbao Publishing House, 1995, p. 93.
4. Li Cheng and Lynn T. White III, "China's Technocratic Movement and the World Economic Herald," *Modern China*, Vol. 17, no. 3, July 1991, pp. 342-388.
5. *Wenzhao Daily*, Dec. 2, 1993, p. 3.
6. *Cankao xiaoxi* (Reference news), July 30, 1994, p. 8.
7. *Baokan wenzhai*, Feb. 16, 1995, p. 4.
8. Theodore Draper, "Intellectuals in Politics," *Encounter*, Vol. 49, No. 6, Dec. 1977, p. 60.

Current Fellows & Their Activities

Bacete Bwogo. A Sudanese from the Shilluk tribe of southern Sudan, Bacete is a physician spending two and one-half years studying health-delivery systems in Costa Rica, Cuba, Kerala State (India) and the Bronx, U.S.A. Bacete did his undergraduate work at the University of Juba and received his M.D. from the University of Alexandria in Egypt. He served as a public-health officer in Port Sudan until 1990, when he moved to England to take advantage of scholarships at the London School of Economics and Oxford University. [THE AMERICAS]

Cheng Li. An Assistant Professor of Government at Hamilton College in Clinton, NY, Cheng Li is studying the growth of technocracy and its impact on the economy of the southeastern coast of China. He began his academic life by earning a Medical Degree from Jing An Medical School in Shanghai, but then did graduate work in Asian Studies and Political Science in the United States, with an M.A. from Berkeley in 1987 and a Ph.D. from Princeton in 1992. [EAST ASIA]

Adam Albion. A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is spending two years studying and writing about Turkey's regional role and growing importance as an actor in the Balkans, the Middle East and the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Cynthia Caron. With a Masters degree in Forest Science from the Yale School of Forestry and Environment, Cynthia is spending two years in South Asia as ICWA's first John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow. She is studying and writing about the impact of forest-preservation projects on the lives (and land-tenure) of indigenous peoples and local farmers who live on their fringes. Her fellowship includes stays in Bhutan, India and Sri Lanka. [SOUTH ASIA/Forest & Society]

Hisham Ahmed. Born blind in the Palestinian Dheisheh Refugee Camp near Bethlehem, Hisham finished his A-levels with the fifth highest score out of 13,000 students throughout Israel. He received a B.A. in political science on a scholarship from Illinois State University and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California in Santa Barbara. Back in East Jerusalem and still blind, Hisham plans to gather oral histories from a broad selection of Palestinians to produce a "Portrait of Palestine" at this crucial point in Middle Eastern history. [MIDEAST/N. AFRICA]

Sharon Griffin. A feature writer and contributing columnist on African affairs at the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Sharon is spending two years in southern Africa studying Zulu and the KwaZulu kingdom and writing about the role of nongovernmental organizations as fulfillment centers for national needs in developing countries where governments are still feeling their way toward effective administration. She plans to travel and live in Namibia and Zimbabwe as well as South Africa. [sub-SAHARA]

Pramila Jayapal. Born in India, Pramila left when she was four and went through primary and secondary education in Indonesia. She graduated from Georgetown University in 1986 and won an M.B.A. from the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois in 1990. She has worked as a corporate analyst for PaineWebber and an accounts manager for the world's leading producer of cardiac defibrillators, but most recently managed a \$7 million developing-country revolving-loan fund for the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in Seattle. Pramila is spending two years in India tracing her roots and studying social issues involving religion, the status of women, population and AIDS. [SOUTH ASIA]

William F. Foote. Formerly a financial analyst with Lehman Brothers' Emerging Markets Group, Willy Foote is examining the economic substructure of Mexico and the impact of free-market reforms on Mexico's people, society and politics. Willy holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University (history), a Master's from the London School of Economics (Development Economics; Latin America) and studied Basque history in San Sebastian, Spain. He carried out intensive Spanish-language studies in Guatemala in 1990 and then worked as a copy editor and Reporter for the Buenos Aires Herald from 1990 to 1992. [THE AMERICAS]

Teresa C. Yates. A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a *juris doctor* from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. While with the ACLU, she also conducted a Seminar on Women in the Law at Fordham Law School in New York. [sub-SAHARA]

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