

# A dissident takes a harsh look at China

by Mary Burdman

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## **A Higher Kind of Loyalty**

by Liu Binyan

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Chinese intellectual Wang Juntao, sentenced in February in Beijing to 13 years in prison as the “black hand of black hands” for refusing to “repent” his support of the 1989 demonstrations, wrote a defiant letter after his trial to the Chinese intellectuals who have failed to support him. Wang, deputy director of the now-closed Beijing Social Economics Institute, was active in the four upsurges against the regime in recent history: the demonstrations after Zhou Enlai’s death in 1976, the Democracy Wall movement of 1979, and the student movements of 1986 and 1989. Knowing that his defiance will make his punishment more severe, Wang wrote that “there are still compatriots in the most difficult situations who are not avoiding danger and who are speaking out from a sense of justice. . . . When I see so many leaders and sponsors of the movement, who, when they face the consequences do not dare to take responsibility, and who slander the movement, I feel very bad about it.” He is concerned less by defects in the system, he wrote, than by “loss of spirits and morality and the standards of the nation.”

Reading Liu Binyan’s memoir, one comes to understand how courageous Wang Juntao is, and also why so many intellectuals have caved in. Liu, who now lives in the U.S., was purged from the Communist Party twice, beginning in the “anti-rightist” campaign in 1957, and he spent 20 years as a pariah, simply because he repeatedly told the truth about the corruption, incompetence, bureaucratism, and waste—especially of human lives—in Communist China.

Liu makes no excuses for the Chinese citizens, including himself, who joined the Communist Party in 1944. He concludes in his book that only they can free China. “The long-suffering Chinese people, after repeatedly being bullied and cheated, have finally given up their last illusions about the Chinese Communist Party. The price that has been wrested from the Chinese people is inevitable, I suppose. We greeted the founding of this state with wild acclaim in 1949; we submitted so docilely to its rule in the ’50s right through to

the ’70s. . . . But the Chinese people have now changed. . . . This is the end of the Chinese people’s adolescence and their initiation into political maturity. They are no longer waiting to be liberated; they are now ready to pay the price to liberate themselves.” *A Higher Kind of Loyalty* is a study of the methods of Chinese Communist repression, which, though physically less brutal than Stalin’s, are more refined. Mao, Liu wrote, was much cleverer than Stalin—instead of killing off all his enemies, he kept many alive, a perpetual target for the repeated, mad campaigns and purges which have prevented China from undertaking its most urgent task for the past century, nation building.

His own political fortunes were “a barometer” by which to judge the political changes in China, Liu wrote, because in 1957 he had written a letter to Mao denouncing the “new aristocracy” in the party and the deterioration of its relations with the people. This act of hubris was enough to draw down Mao’s perpetual ire, especially because Liu had another drawback: He had traveled in 1949 to both the U.S.S.R. and Hungary, and in 1956 to Poland. The year 1956 was a critical one. Just as the Chinese rural economy was beginning to recover from the devastation of World War II, the protests in Poland and the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 stirred a “fateful” reaction in Mao Zedong. The name of Hungarian nationalist leader Imre Nagy has been a by-word for treason in China ever since. Mao launched the “Hundred Flowers Movement,” to draw out dissenters and entrap them, and then the insanity of the “Great Leap Forward,” causing a famine in which millions died. Strikes were banned and peasants forced into communes and total regimentation.

## **The toll of Maoism**

The result has been the stagnation of China, with peasants and workers resorting to their one possible means of protest, work slowdowns, which have continued for 30 years. Otherwise, there has been a terrible deterioration of the character of the Chinese. As Liu wrote in his last article to appear in China in 1985, entitled “Another Kind of Loyalty,” people are “on the watch for changes of wind and to always be ready to shift allegiance.” Mediocrity is the greatest virtue, and the road to promotion in the vast bureaucracy. But those who rose to power had to lose their humanity, to train themselves not to be moved by suffering or not to see that their country was in peril, with no qualms. “To ensure this peace of mind, another set of people had to cooperate: Millions of Chinese had to remain ignorant and docile, and put their fates into the hands of such officials,” Liu wrote.

It was a visit to Germany in 1986 which was a revelation, Liu wrote. Germany had genuinely changed itself after the Nazi disaster, woken from a nightmare and “shaken free.” But China, where it is barely allowed to even mention the Cultural Revolution, has preserved for over 30 years the same disastrous political setup created by Mao. China is nearer freedom after 1989, but only “one step,” Liu concluded.