Cultural Reviews

In Search of the Soul of Lin Zhao

BY JIN ZHONG

A new independent Chinese documentary relates the story of Lin Zhao, a political prisoner executed 35 years ago. The tragic tale of "China's Joan of Arc" is inspiring reflection and self-examination among Chinese intellectuals.

To execute a prisoner and then charge her family five *fen* for the bullet—that is the shocking aspect of Lin Zhao's story. An official Xinhua News Agency report on Lin Zhao's wrongful death in 1981 noted, "This is an amazing story that makes one's hair stand on end." But over the past 20-odd years, Lin Zhao has disappeared from public view; the official media have not been allowed to report further on the case, and this heroic fighter seemed to have sunk to the bottom of the lake of history.

Five years ago, Hu Jie, a 40-year old independent filmmaker raised in a military household, was deeply disturbed upon learning of the case of Lin Zhao, a Peking University student who was named a "rightist," used her own blood to write hundreds of thousands of words in prison and was finally executed. He decided to "resurrect" Lin Zhao, and at his own expense interviewed many of Lin Zhao's fellow students, friends and family members. After collecting a great deal of material over the course of several years, he edited what he'd gathered into a documentary called, "In Search of the Soul of Lin Zhao," which revisits Lin Zhao's short and tragic life.

Documentary film director Hu Jie. Photo: Open Magazine

Lin Zhao was born in 1932 in the southern city of Suzhou to a family that was deeply concerned with China's affairs. As a secondary school student, she joined her mother as a participant in the Communist underground movement. In 1954, her brilliant academic performance gained her acceptance into Peking University's Department of Classical Chinese. In 1957, after she expressed disagreement with Mao Zedong's anti-rightist movement, she herself was labeled a rightist and a "class enemy," but she refused to recant. In 1960, she was arrested on charges of counterrevolution for publishing an underground magazine, and was imprisoned in Shanghai's Tilanqiao Prison. In prison she continued to protest, and wrote many essays criticizing the Chinese Communist Party. When she failed to respond to correction, her hands were handcuffed behind her back for 180 days. She was given no reprieve, even during menstruation. According to her younger sister, Mao Zedong himself went to the prison to interrogate Lin Zhao, but she still refused to yield.

In 1962, the authorities agreed to release Lin Zhao for medical treatment, but she refused to leave prison. After her family forcibly brought her home, Lin Zhao continued to write voluminous criticisms of the government. Several months later, she was arrested again, and back in prison she prepared for the inevitability of death. She submitted articles to the *People's Daily*, went on hunger strike and wrote essays in her own blood. She left behind hundreds of thousands of words in the form of journals, essays, letters to her family and poems brimming with brilliance and emotion. Lin Zhao's fellow student, Zhang Yuanxun, visited Lin Zhao in prison in 1966 after he himself was released from custody for rightist offences. He found that Lin Zhao's hair had turned white, a mark of her oppression. Lin Zhao told him in front of the prison guards that she had been subjected to horrendous abuse and violence.

One of the spiritual pillars in Lin Zhao's deadly struggle was her Christian faith. Using her own blood as ink, she wrote, "As I silently rub the drops of blood on the wall, I can only find the right words when I think of that merciful and just God who is so far away, and yet so close . . . As a Christian, my life belongs to my God. In order to persist on my path, the path of a servant of God, this young person has paid a heavy physical and psychological price." In April 1968, Lin Zhao was executed in secret. She was 35 years old.

Lin Zhao was rehabilitated in 1981. Of the 800-odd Peking University students who had been labeled rightists, she was the only one who chose to die rather than to admit her error, and who left behind the vestiges and legacy of her protest. But only a very small portion of her writings has ever been made public; the vast majority remains sealed by the authorities (with a stated time limit of 50 years). From the portions of essays revealed in Hu Jie's documentary, it can be seen that Lin Zhao was highly knowledgeable and critical of Mao Zedong's dictatorial rule, especially over the deception of China's youth; she voiced particular indignation over how China's youth was defrauded in 1957. She wrote, "The cunning villains used our innocence, naivety and honesty; they incited and steered our virtue, purity and fervent temperaments. When we realized the actual absurdity of the situation and began to demand our democratic rights, we were subjected to unprecedented persecution and suppression. Our youth, passion, learning, idealism and joy were all sacrificed to the terrible rule of this wicked tyranny. How can this not be blood?"[1] At the time that Lin Zhao wrote these words, Mao Zedong had initiated a Cultural Revolution even more crazed than the anti-rightist movement, and in the name of revolution defrauded and used even more young people to violent and murderous ends.

A video compact disc of Hu Jie's documentary circulating in Hong Kong and overseas has raised strong reactions. Many people break into tears while watching it; they recommend it to each other and organize group viewings, and many writers have extolled Lin Zhao as the most trenchant critic of the Mao era, a cultural pillar who puts her male contemporaries to shame. *Open Magazine* has presented the view that Lin Zhao is altogether worthy to be ranked among the greatest freedom fighters of the 20th century, a Chinese Joan of Arc, and has appealed to China's intelligentsia to

make Lin Zhao a household name. Hong Kong film critics have expressed the hope that China's future artists might someday produce an even more outstanding film on Lin Zhao. Some overseas scholars have suggested that the film be dubbed or subtitled in English to give the West a better understanding of China.

In China, the VCD of this independent film has also circulated around campuses and intellectual circles. Some university professors have organized screenings for students in the hopes of raising consciousness and reflection on historical events. An essay by Professor Ai Xiaoming of Guangzhou's Zhong Shan University points out, "In today's era of building human rights, the spirit of Lin Zhao is a rediscovered legacy; she challenged the moral bottom line of the Chinese of her era, and teaches us that our actions are more important than our ideologies." Ai Xiaoming also highly praises the way that Lin Zhao, in an environment of darkness and brutality, "preserved her poetic vision and aesthetic sensibility."

Hu Jie's documentary successfully uses film angles, visuals and music to coolly yet emotionally depict the beauty of Lin Zhao's spirit and her loving and virtuous nature. Tan Tianrong, a retired Qingdao University professor who was once Lin Zhao's companion in love and in leading the rightists of Peking University, delivered a eulogy this past April before Lin Zhao's ashes. Comparing Lin Zhao to Qiu Jin (1875–1907), a heroic woman who gave her life in the anti-Manchu rebellion, he said, "The blood of a fragile woman is raising the consciousness of a nation."

Written on August 15, 2004
Translated by Stacy Mosher

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

1. The sentence "How can this not be blood" does not seem to follow naturally from the previous sentence. However, it is repeated as a refrain several times in the quoted essay, so has been translated literally as it is phrased in Chinese.

Tilting at Windmills

A Review of *Wild Grass: Three Stories of Change in Modern China*
Ian Johson
Pantheon Books, 2004
336 pages, $16.80

BY TOM KELLOGG

Consider the following news stories, plucked from the newspapers over the last several weeks:

- "Villager is beaten senseless after trying to expose corruption," AFP, August 2, 2004: Zhen Shuqing, a 46-year old peanut farmer from Hebei province, was beaten senseless and his daughter was jailed after he began looking into corruption in his village. Zhen began looking into serious allegations of corruption after he was elected chairman of the finance committee of Sanlitun, a village of 3,000 mostly poor farmers. Zhen ignored threats against him by local officials, and finally faced a visit from four men, who beat him with iron bars until he passed out. "I was bedridden for two months," Mr. Zhen said. "I'm not sure if I'll ever be able to walk properly."

- "HK gambler bailed in Shenzhen: I was denied medical help, I was left paralyzed, says defendant in fraud case," *South China Morning Post,* July 23, 2004: Hong Kong resident Ng Kwong-ming, 42, was beaten in a detention center in Shaoguan, Guangdong province after allegedly conning the vice-mayor of Shaoguan out of more than 1.5 million *yuan* during a card game. Ng was refused medical treatment, and was left paralyzed from the waist down after his injuries from the beating were left untreated. Ng was allowed to go to the hospital only after Hong Kong newspapers publicized his case, and he has appealed to the Hong Kong immigration authorities to have the corruption charges against him stemming from the card game transferred to a Hong Kong court.

- "Plea for Honesty Transfixes China: Lowly Party Cadre Decries Official Corruption in Open Letter," *Washington Post Foreign Service,* August 14, 2004: Government official Huang Jingao, a county-level cadre in coastal Fujian province, wrote a long letter to the central government complaining about widespread corruption, and lamenting that his efforts to take action on individual cases were hamstrung by more senior officials. In a sign of increasing central government frustration over the problem, Huang's letter was published on the Web site of the flagship *People's Daily,* and dozens of papers followed the *People's Daily*'s lead. Huang himself is no stranger to anti-corruption fights: several years ago, he uncovered an illegal slaughterhouse in Fuzhou that was under the protection of the local police, which led to several arrests. During the Fuzhou investigation, Huang had to wear a bulletproof vest and was protected by bodyguards because of constant threats.

None of these stories is particularly uncommon or atypical; I found them without really looking, just as I was reading the day's headlines. With little effort, I could have found dozens more stories of graft and violence, as both are very much a part of daily life in China today.

U.S. foreign policy toward China has for some time been predicated on the idea that China is inching toward democracy and the rule of law, however slowly. Positive engagement, so the theory goes, will help China make the transition from authoritarian one-party state to modern middle-class rights-respecting nation. After dabbling with tough talk on China and openly flirting with Taiwan in the early days of his administration, President Bush got serious after September 11 and has since pursued roughly the same line that his Democratic predecessor took on China, one of engagement and cooperation.

The theory is simple enough: as China's citizens grow richer through trade and foreign investment, they will begin to ask for more and more freedoms from their government, and the government will be both less able to refuse and, as bureaucrats become more highly trained, more willing to comply with its citizens' demands.

The progress that China has made on all fronts over the last twenty-five years is undeniable. Yet U.S. policy bromides to the contrary, it is not yet on an unalterable path to democracy, human rights, rule of law and

middle class stability. A political "soft landing" is, of course, the most hoped-for and perhaps—perhaps—the most likely outcome. But it's also possible that China could end up suffering the same fate as its former soviet sister, Russia, a case study in mafiosi-ocracy. Instead of continuing to grow NGOs, reform and improve the court system, and increase the latitude and independence of journalists and the media, China could instead fall victim to all of the countertrends one sees in China today, those of rampant and rising corruption, violence and thuggery.

Ian Johnson's *Wild Grass: Three Stories of Change in Modern China* gives us a vivid and compelling picture of contemporary China, as illustrated by three extended narratives. Although it is not his intent to make such predictions, Johnson's reporting raises the very real and very dangerous possibility that China could, if current trends continue unchecked, subvert the recent progress towards rule of law, and instead become a country in which, to borrow a phrase from Chairman Mao, political power comes out of the barrel of a gun, at least at the local level.

Each of the three stories has a central character, but none of the three is about only one individual. Instead, the three narratives take on three separate issues, each of which are illustrative of the challenges facing China midway through its third full decade of reform. Johnson's approach is dictated in part by his theory that change in contemporary China is more of a ground-up process than most outsiders realize. In Johnson's view,

> . . . the push for change comes mostly from people we rarely hear of: the small-town lawyer who decides to sue the government, the architect who champions dispossessed homeowners, the woman who tries to expose police brutality. Some are motivated by narrow interests of family or village, others by idealism. All, successful or not, are sowing the seeds of change in China, helping to foment a slow-motion revolution.

In other words, the story of China as an authoritarian state in which a small band of political dissidents rage against the political machine doesn't explain China today. Instead, China is a country of thousands of political acts each day, in which residents, be they peasant farmers or city straphangers, are often compelled to become activists, merely to defend themselves against the local government's stealing, conniving and cheating. In the case of the Falungong spiritual movement, they are fighting to be simply left alone.

The story of Ma Wenlin—the so-called "peasants' champion"—illustrates this phenomenon of reluctant, accidental activist particularly well. His is the story of defending those men and women who didn't put down their hoes and head off for China's booming cities, but instead continued to tend farms in the countryside.

What makes poverty in rural China different from the poverty of, say, rural Mississippi is this: in China, too often, the government is an active facilitator of poverty. Whereas rural America often suffers from the cruelty of government neglect, much of rural China suffers from a greedy, bloated local government that ignores orders from Beijing to lessen peasants' tax burden, and instead continues to extract as much money as it can from its constituents, by force if necessary. Instead of acting as the agent of economic development and empowerment, local government in China all too often is a greedy hand that takes as much as it can and gives little in return.

Ma Wenlin, a self-trained lawyer and peasant advocate, saw first hand the suffering of farmers in Tuo'erxiang in Zizhou County, near his hometown of historic Yan'an, and tried to do something about it.

It could be argued that the anti-tax movement is the strongest political movement in America today, although the anti-abortion groups would take exception to this assessment. If it were permissible to found a Chinese version of the American anti-tax Club for Growth, it would quickly rocket to the top of China's nascent civil society scene.

But such a group's makeup and approach would be wildly different from the American anti-taxers. Instead of being the province of the rich, the movement in China would be swollen with the ranks of the working class poor. And instead of haranguing against the predations of the national government, as happens in the U.S., anti-taxers in China would beg for more central government intervention to protect them against the remorseless pillaging by local and provincial officials.

In China, the problem of excessive local taxation is severe, and Beijing has tried to do something about it. In 1991, for example, the government declared that the maximum total tax rate for rural farmers would be five percent of the farmer's annual income. As Johnson points out, this would be a bargain in any industrialized country. New York City alone extracts an 8.25% sales tax from its residents, in addition to taking a small bite out of city-dwellers' income. The additional state and federal taxes add up to more than one-third of even a relatively low-income family's income, and can be well over one-half for upper-income families.

But the devil is in the details. Local governments in China charge fees for everything that the government can think of, regardless of whether the government actually delivers anything in return for the money collected. And this is not counted as part of the five percent. What seemed like a generous solution meant simply that local governments had to make semantic changes to their revenue collection schemes—which meant that protests against local tax collectors continued to escalate.

Mr. Ma got involved in defending a group of peasants who were accused of engaging in rebellion against the government, and was eventually himself accused, and later tried and convicted, of stirring up the peasants in revolt, of "disturbing social order." Ma did not match the Hollywood description of the crusading lawyer; instead he had come to the law late in life, more by accident than by design. According to Johnson:

> . . . Mr. Ma didn't fit into the category of young romantic. Born in 1942, Mr. Ma was fifty-five at the time he filed his lawsuit [on behalf of the peasants of Tuo'erxiang]. He had spent almost all his life under communist rule; there had been no overseas education for him, no familiarity with English, no real knowledge of the outside world. In a country where many people retire at sixty, Mr. Ma was an old man born of an old system. I couldn't imagine what could cause such a person to challenge the system, setting in motion a massive lawsuit and, if I believed the court documents, protests and demonstrations across the countryside.

It all began when Mr. Ma went back to Zizhou county to visit relatives during the

Lunar New Year holiday in 1997. While there, he was approached by some peasant farmers, who told him of their troubles. Drought had struck the area, and the harvest was down from past years, but the government officials had insisted on collecting the same share of taxes and fees. Many farmers either refused to pay or simply couldn't pay, and they were roughed up and thrown in jail for their insubordination.

The farmers wanted to sue the government, and they wanted Ma to help them. They were inspired by a recent case in neighboring Peijiawan, in which local farmers had taken the local government to court over excessive fees, and won a reprieve from the court. The court in the Peijiawan case even ordered the local government to return the amount that the peasants were overcharged—a full $75,000—back to the peasants.

The farmers in Tuo'erxiang wanted the same justice that the peasants in Peijiawan had gotten. But the problem with the legal system in China is not only that it often fails to bring justice, but that it also fails to deliver consistency, as Ma and the Tuo'erxiang farmers would soon learn. After struggling for some time over what to do, Mr. Ma agreed to take the case, and he filed the necessary papers a few weeks later.

Despite the fact that the Peijiawan verdict had been issued just a few months before, the court refused to even hear the Tuo'erxiang case. With the legal avenue blocked, Mr. Ma decided to take the political route. He helped organize a peasant association—the Tuo'erxiang County Farmers Anti-corruption and Reducing Tax Burden Volunteer Liaison Small Group—to challenge the government. Whereas American NGOs compete with each other to come up with the pithiest, most dramatic name possible, in China groups tend to choose names that demonstrate that they are part of the system, not monitoring it. As Johnson puts it, the group's name was "quite a mouthful," but it was chosen to signal the group's "apolitical and nonthreatening nature."

In retrospect, the founding of the peasants' association was probably a mistake. The group organized farmers, wrote appeals and even held some small public protests, all to no avail. The peasants themselves, frustrated that the government was still by turns threatening and ignoring them, crossed the line and raided a government office in April 1999. They claimed that the office contained documents that proved their case, and they held a government official hostage for more than two weeks, demanding relief. The hostage incident was later used against Mr. Ma as evidence that he was orchestrating events and stirring up peasants to strike out against the government. Mr. Ma denied that he had instigated the incident.

After the April 1999 office takeover, Mr. Ma's days were numbered. In July, he set out with a group of peasant representatives for Beijing in a last-ditch effort to circumvent the local government and win the review he had been asking for since 1997. When he arrived in Beijing, Mr. Ma went with the farmers to the State Council Petitions and Appeals Office to state his case. He was met by two men from the Beijing Public Security Bureau. Rather than hear him out, the two men beat him, knocking more than a dozen teeth out of his mouth. Within days, he was returned to Zizhou, and was quickly tried and sentenced to five years in a labor camp.

Johnson gives a detailed account of the trial, which was marred by numerous procedural irregularities, the presentation of shaky evidence and more than a few gratuitous cruelties. The peasants he represented never won the relief Ma was fighting for, but even after Ma was sentenced, they continued to demand action from the government, using much of Ma's work as the basis for their petitions. One farmer interviewed by Johnson asked him to get the word out on Mr. Ma's case: "Just tell people that we're responsible, not Lawyer Ma," the farmer told Johnson during a quick, furtive conversation in a hotel lobby. "He was just our lawyer."

The other two stories told by Johnson in *Wild Grass* point out similar shortcomings in China's legal system, and illustrate similar deep-seated problems of government corruption and abuse of power. In his second story, he switches from country to capital to tell the story of city dwellers forced out of their homes by developers eager to rip down centuries-old hutongs, or alleyways, in order to build mammoth skyscrapers. Local residents are often offered little or no compensation for their lost homes, and are regularly forced to move out with just a few weeks' notice.

As I paged through this section, I was struck by how it could be read as a polemic for why China needs a freer press. If all of Beijing knew that the home of early 20th century reformer Kang Youwei—one of many historically important houses facing demolition in Johnson's second narrative—was going to be leveled, politicians would fall over themselves to fix the situation. Kang's house would become a protected monument, and the entire city government would claim personal responsibility for saving a small but important piece of Chinese history.

The third and final story focuses on Falungong activist Li Guoqiang, who bicycles around the capital organizing fellow practitioners who come to Beijing from around the country to protest against the years-long crackdown on the Qigong meditation group. Johnson does an excellent job of telling the back-story of Falungong, of how it became so popular so quickly, and details the government's moves to stamp it out, beginning in mid-1999. To many outside observers, Falungong is undeniably strange. Johnson's explication does much to demystify the group's beliefs, and his detailed analysis of what makes a religious group a "cult" or just another sect helpfully cuts through Beijing's overheated rhetoric.

His approach to Falungong is typical of his approach throughout the book—the stories are narrative-based, told through the lives of the participants. But Johnson also explains the historical and political background of each of the three issues that he takes on in the book. Johnson's style is engaging and his analysis is spot-on. I found myself quibbling with a word here and there—is this characterization a bit too harsh? Is this one a bit too sweeping?—but generally found myself nodding in agreement.

Johnson sticks to his issues, and largely avoids an over-arching analysis on the basis of his reporting. But the book raises significant questions about the path of reforms in post-Mao China, and begs the question of whether these reforms might ultimately turn out to be self-defeating.

For many, the question is whether the necessary reform mechanisms can be built up in time to save China before it is consumed by corruption, greed and incompetence. The characters in Johnson's book are all noble, human figures taking on a cor-

rupt system that does not hesitate to beat up an old man or arrest a retired woman in order to ensure that its authority is enforced and its ill-gotten profits protected. The men and women who challenge the government in the three stories in Johnson's book are united by a sense of duty, a willingness to fight for what is right and a belief that, if a sufficiently senior official's ear can be turned, the problem will be solved.

My fear is that, as time goes on, the number of people who think as Ma and the others do will shrink rather than grow. As Johnson's book makes clear, corruption in China is still very much institutionalized, and the state still has a near-monopoly on violence. But as the free market expands, guns will likely become easier to obtain. Violence could become an all-to-common method of doing business, a cheaper alternative to resolving disputes in court. In such a situation, a stubborn lawyer such as Ma Wenlin might not get a five-year prison sentence for his troubles, but rather be faced with threats against his wife and family, a severe beating, or worse.

The men and women at the center of Johnson's three narratives are united in their belief that the system can respond. But just as importantly, all three are united in loss. None of the cases chronicled by Johnson ends in victory for the wronged party. Instead, in each case the government compounded an initial injustice with further abuse. This is not a good sign.

There are many positive trends in China, just as easily found in the day's newspaper as the stories of abuse, violence and corruption. And all countries in transition go through growing pains as they develop the basic institutions of a rule of law system. Perhaps the move that has gained the most attention was the constitutional amendment, passed earlier this year, protecting human rights. Discussions continue regarding how to best implement this new provision. *Wild Grass* demonstrates that this law has come none too soon. It came too late for Ma Wenlin, but there are hundreds, if not thousands, of citizens just like him who still need it.

Hope for a Greener China

A Review of *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future*
Elizabeth Economy
A Council on Foreign Relations Book / Cornell University Press, 2004
272 pages, $29.95

BY ANDREA WORDEN

The ominous story of the relentless degradation of China's environment is reflected in the titles of many of the accounts dealing with China's environmental ills that have appeared over the past 20 years: *The Bad Earth: Environmental Degradation in China* (Vaclav Smil, 1984), *China on the Edge: The Crisis of Ecology and Development* (He Bochuan, 1988), *China's Environmental Crisis: An Inquiry into the Limits of National Development* (Vaclav Smil, 1993), and *The Last Panda* (George Shaller, 1993). Dr. Elizabeth Economy, C.V. Starr Senior Fellow and Director of Asia Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, has made an impressive contribution to this literature with her recently published—and no less ominously entitled—*The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future.*

In *The River Runs Black,* Economy explores not only China's current environmental situation, but also the historical, economic and political factors that have led to the crisis. She describes and analyzes the weak environmental regulatory structure that is institutionally unable to do enough, fast enough, to either remedy current problems or prevent further degradation as China's population continues to grow, living standards continue to rise, and Chinese consumption and demand for natural resources skyrockets.

She also explores China's engagement with the international community on environmental issues, as well as the growth of the environmental movement in China and the role it may play in furthering political reform.

The Chinese economic miracle, driven by the principle of "economic growth first," has led to a significant increase in the standard of living for hundreds of millions of Chinese and has turned China into "a global economic powerhouse," but at a tremendous environmental cost. Whether China will be able to turn its environmental situation around, and how it might do so, is the ultimate question posed by Economy's insightful work. Economy concludes the book with three possible future scenarios for China and its environment, and leaves the reader to ponder which is the most likely. *The River Runs Black* is a must-read for anyone interested in governance issues in China, the rise of civil society, and China (and the world's) environmental predicament and future.

The environmental situation in China was alarming enough when *The Bad Earth* appeared 20 years ago; a glimpse at some of the statistics offered in *The River Runs Black* reveals an even grimmer picture of the deleterious effects of twenty years of unbridled economic growth:

- According to the World Bank, 16 of the 20 cities in the world with the most polluted air are in China;
- China's sulfur dioxide emissions, which cause acid rain, are the highest in the world; acid rain affects over 25 percent of China's land, including one third of its farm land;
- The annual pace of desertification in northwest China has doubled since the 1970s; today more than 25 percent of China's territory is desert;
- During the mid-1990s, nearly half of China's 140 forest bureaus reported that trees were being felled at unsustainable rates;
- More than 75 percent of the water flowing through China's urban areas is unsuitable for drinking or fishing;
- 60 million people find it difficult to get enough water for their daily needs;
- 25 percent of the endangered species listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species are found in China.

Not only is China's natural environment suffering, but continuing environmental degradation has brought with it severe social and economic costs. In the late 1990s, China's Minister of Public Security listed environmental disputes (such as conflicts over forests, grasslands and mineral resources) as one of the "four factors in social instability." Moreover, during the 1990s, an estimated 20–30 million farmers were displaced as a result of environmental degradation and an estimated 30–40 million more may need to relocate during the next 20 years. The public health ramifications of China's environmental

degradation include an estimated 178,000 premature deaths annually in China's urban areas as a result of atmospheric pollution in excess of standards. Indoor air pollution causes an additional 111,000 premature deaths each year. The economic cost of environmental degradation and resource scarcity is estimated to be between 8–12 percent of GDP annually. These costs include $54 billion annually from air and water pollution damages and $14 billion per year in lost industrial output in Chinese cities due to water scarcity.[1]

What is the Chinese leadership doing to respond to these pressing problems? Economy cogently explains the emergence of China's environmental regulatory system and the impressive array of laws, regulations, standards and rules that have been enacted in an attempt to address the myriad environmental issues confronting China.[2] Despite these notable efforts, Economy argues that environmental management suffers from a weak central bureaucracy, which is unable to effectively enforce central policy directives and environmental laws and standards at the local level. While the central budget for environmental protection is increasing (as percentage of GDP), it is still inadequate.[3] The underfunded and understaffed State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) has a full-time staff of only 300, whereas the U.S. equivalent—the EPA—has a staff of more than six thousand.

The local environmental protection bureaus (EPBs), which number approximately 2,500 nationwide and also suffer from a lack of resources, are even weaker. SEPA only has a supervisory role over local EPBs, which are dependent on local governments at their same level for funding, salaries, career advancement and other resources. Since the primary concern of local governments is economic growth, local EPBs often find it very difficult to take action against, or collect fines from, state-owned enterprises (which are often the heaviest polluters) that employ a large number of workers, or other enterprises that are key to local economic interests (including, often, the business interests of local government officials). Economy provides useful examples of how corruption, conflicts of interest and institutional weakness—compounded by the lack of incentives for local governments to undertake environmental protection—result in widespread disregard for environmental laws, regulations and penalties. Local courts are often of little help to the local EPBs because they are similarly dependent on local governments for funding and other resources, and thus are inclined (or persuaded) to side with local industry. A Chinese environmental lawyer explained: "In all the suits that we have lost, the courts have not followed the law. Instead, they ignored the legal or technical merits of our case in order to support the local enterprises."

The environmental picture Economy paints is not one of unmitigated bleakness, however. She notes that there is a "vast, ongoing environmental education effort" throughout Chinese society. She also describes the substantial international assistance for environmental protection in China, and provides examples of the wide range of public and private cooperative projects that encompass environmental policy design, technology transfer, capacity building and enforcement strategies and mechanisms. In addition, some local governments in wealthier cities (e.g., Shanghai, Dalian and Zhongshan), inspired by proactive mayors, have embraced the cause of environmental protection. They have dedicated a greater percentage of local revenue to environmental protection than other cities and have provided needed backing and support to local EPBs.[4] The international community has also played an important role in China's top environmental cities; Economy points out that these cities have long-term cooperative projects with various multilateral organizations and foreign countries.

The most fascinating aspect of the hopeful part of China's environmental story is the burgeoning environmental movement in China and the role civil society organizations (CSOs), student groups, environmental lawyers and environmental journalists are playing in environmental protection. In the chapter titled, "The New Politics of the Environment," Economy introduces us to some of the key players in the environmental movement through illuminating interviews, and provides what feels very much like an insider's view into the dynamics, strategies and challenges facing environmental activists and their organizations. Economy observes that it is an open question whether China's civil society (of which environmental CSOs are at the forefront) will grow into a force for broader political change (as in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and certain countries in Asia). But she appears confident that China's environmental CSOs will play a role in China's eventual political transformation.[5]

A recurring theme in Economy's work is the necessity of political reform if China is to effectively and comprehensively address its environmental crisis. In her concluding chapter, Economy writes:

> A future in which China fully embraces environmental protection will require new approaches to integrating economic development with environmental protection. Equally, if not more, important will be a commitment by China's leaders to develop the political institutions necessary to ensure such a future, to bring true transparency and accountability to the system of environmental protection.

Some of the environmental activists who appear in her book have drawn a direct link between democracy and environmental protection. For example, Tang Xiyang, who along with his wife established the first Green Camp in China, wrote in a 1993 account of his "green" travels around the world:

> I found the chief guarantee of nature protection to be the practice of democracy. Without real democracy there can be no everlasting green hills and clear waters. I am convinced that nature conservation is a cause for a whole nation. It won't do to depend on a wise emperor or president. Hundreds of millions of people must realize and show concern for this problem. When they all dare to speak and act, the emperor or president has to do something; otherwise he cannot continue in office. After visiting many countries and observing others' attitudes, I feel democracy is necessary to the protection of nature.[6]

Although Economy does not argue that full-fledged democracy is the answer to China's environmental crisis—indeed, Bush's assault on the environment of the United States during the past three and a half years is evidence that democracies do not necessarily guarantee protection of the environment—her work underscores the importance of democracy's core elements

to successful environmental protection.[7] These elements include a vibrant civil society and freedom of association, freedom of expression and open discussion and debate, a free press, rule of law and an independent judiciary, public participation in policy making, accountability and transparency at every level of government and the free flow of information.[8]

Economy concludes *The River Runs Black* with a call for a more active role by the United States in assisting China in its environmental protection efforts.[9] She sensibly recommends that the U.S. should remove the restrictions on the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the U.S.-Asia Environmental Partnership, which would provide assistance to U.S. businesses seeking to establish themselves in China's environmental technologies market, and should also remove the restrictions on the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)'s involvement in China. Economy argues for a "newfound commitment" by the U.S. leadership "to take the bold steps necessary" not only to "benefit more significantly from China's current reform process but also to aid in the future evolution of that process in ways that serve broader U.S. political, economic, and environmental interests."

China's environmental ills and increasing demand for natural resources are a global concern. South Korea and Japan attribute much of their acid rain problem to China, and dust storms from China have traveled as far as California.[10] A recent *New York Times* article noted that there is a growing concern that "the world simply may not have enough energy and other resources for China to continue developing along present lines, especially at the present rate."[11] The United States and China are the world's first and second largest consumers of energy, "yet on a per capita basis, the Chinese consume scarcely 10 percent of the energy used by Americans."[12] Car sales in China have been increasing at the alarming rate of 80 percent annually.[13] Indeed, China is poised to surpass the United States as the world's largest producer of greenhouse gases sometime during the next five to fifteen years.[14]

But as Vaclav Smil, noted scholar of China's environment, cautions, we "must not forget that leading Western nations have so far failed to implement integrated, systematic environmental management truly compatible with long-term sustainability of an advanced, global civilization."[15] Indeed, the United States, rather than providing leadership on the global environmental agenda, has more often than not proved obstructionist,[16] and has shown a "persistent disregard for sustainable growth."[17] If present trends in both the United States and China continue, it is difficult to be optimistic about a sustainable future.

"China Goes Green" is one of the three possible future scenarios Economy leaves us with at the end of *The River Runs Black*. Might we one day see the appearance of a book entitled something like, *A Better Earth: What China's Environmental Turnaround in the Early 21st Century Can Teach the World About Sustainable Development and Environmental Governance*? Let's hope that is the next book

1. These estimates are from a 1997 World Bank report on China's environment. It's not unreasonable to assume these figures have increased over the past seven years.
2. Richard Ferris and Hongjun Zhang have pointed out that (as of 2002) China was party to more than eighty environmental treaties, had enacted more than sixteen environmental, health and safety statutes, issued several hundred regulations on the environment, health and safety and more than 1,000 such standards. See Ferris and Zhang, *The Challenges of Reforming and Environmental Legal Culture: Assessing the Status Quo and Looking at Post-WTO Admission Challenges for the People's Republic of China,* 14 Geo. Int'l Envtl. L. Rev. 429, 430 (2002).
3. Central investment in the environment has risen from 0.8 percent of GDP during 1996 to 2000 to 1.3 percent of GDP allocated for 2001 to 2005 (about $85 billion). Economy notes that Chinese scientists say that 2.2 percent of GDP is needed merely to keep the environmental situation at the status quo. See Economy, at 107; see also *Testimony of Elizabeth Economy for the Congressional Executive Commission on China's Roundtable Clearing the Air: The Human Rights and Legal Dimensions of China's Environmental Dilemma,* January 27, 2003, available at http://www.cecc.gov/pages/roundtables/012703/index.php. ["CECC Testimony"].
4. But Economy warns that there may be environmental justice issues lurking behind these success stories; the most environmentally proactive cities "often pursue environmental cleanup by exporting their polluting industries to points just outside the city limits." (Economy, at 120).
5. See Elizabeth Economy, "The grass-roots greening of China," *International Herald Tribune,* April 21, 2004 ("Throughout China, people have become energized by their desire to contribute to the protection of nature. In so doing, they have also set the pace for the advance of civil society and the development of democracy.")
6. This paragraph (among others) was deleted by Chinese government censors in both the Chinese and English language versions of Tang's book, *A Green World Tour.* Tang has "countered the censors by amassing a large number of copies of the book at his home and reinserting the censored portions by hand."
7. See, *e.g.,* Carl Pope and Paul Rauber, *Strategic Ignorance: Why the Bush Administration is Recklessly Destroying a Century of Environmental Progress* (Sierra Club Books, 2004); Robert Devine, *Bush Versus the Environment* (Anchor Books, 2004). One of the key elements of a democracy is, of course, regular multiparty elections, and it is through elections that leaders are held accountable for their policies and performance. As Polish democracy activist Adam Michnik has stated: "Only democracy—having the capacity to question itself—also has the capacity to correct its own mistakes."
8. See also Elizabeth Economy, "The grass-roots greening of China," *International Herald Tribune,* April 21, 2004 ("While China's environmental activists recognize that democracy is not a guarantor of a clean environment, they consider its basic principles—political transparency, freedom of speech, assembly and press, rule of law and official accountability through open and direct elections—to offer the greatest hope.").

   This point is driven home in Judith Shapiro's recent account of the devastation inflicted on China's environment during the Mao years, *Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). Shapiro shows time and again in her fascinating book how the lack of an open political process, accountability, rule of law and freedom of speech resulted in untold disasters—for individuals and the environment.

   In the realm of international environmental law, James Speth, dean and professor in the practice of environmental policy and sustainable development at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies has recently argued that "the transition in governance to capable, accountable, and democratic governments" is essential if international environmental law and global

environmental agreements are to be effectively implemented. See James Gustave Speth, *Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment,* at 173 (Yale University Press, 2004).

9. See, *e.g.,* CECC Testimony; Elizabeth Economy, "Don't Break the Engagement," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2004) (arguing more broadly for continued engagement with China).
10. This point was also included in Economy's CECC Testimony.
11. Howard French, "China's Boom Brings Fear of an Electricity Breakdown," *New York Times,* July 5, 2004.
12. *Id.*
13. Keith Bradsher, "China Pays a Price for Cheaper Oil," *New York Times,* June 26, 2004.
14. Vaclav Smil, "Development and Destruction: The Dimensions of China's Environmental Challenge," in *China beyond the Headlines, at 211* (Timothy Weston and Lionel Jensen eds., 2000).
15. *Id.* at 213.
16. Speth, at 88. Speth notes that the only instance of U.S. leadership on a global environmental problem was its role in brokering an international agreement on ozone depletion in the mid-1980s. See discussion at 92–96. Speth also contends that "[i]f there is one country that bears most responsibility for the lack of progress on international environmental issues, it is the United States." (Speth, at 109). For more information about *Red Sky at Morning* and his citizen's guide for action, see http://www.redskyatmorning.com/resourcesforcitizens.html.
17. Smil, "Development and Destruction," at 195.

The Beastly Poet of China

A Review of *A Bilingual Edition of Poetry Out of Communist China by Huang Xiang*
Huang Xiang, translated by Andrew G. Emerson
The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004
408 pages, $100

BY STACY MOSHER

A few years ago I was amazed to observe the degree of controversy among Chinese intellectuals over the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Gao Xinjian. A reasonable level of genuine or envy-induced scorn might have been expected within artistic circles, but what surprised me was that even outside of artistic circles, friends of many years' standing stopped talking to each other for months because they were mutually offended by their different opinions of the merits of Gao's work.

When I related my observations to an American academic friend, she responded, "Well, at least they argue about something meaningful. I spent the last weekend with a group of colleagues from the university, and all they talked about was football!"

There are probably not many places left in the world where art and intellectual ideas remain a matter of genuine political import, or even a matter of life and death. Anyone familiar with China has become accustomed to the thoroughly unacceptable reality that people can still be imprisoned and persecuted for nothing more than an unauthorized opinion. This unhappy fact goes a long way in explaining the intractable disagreements that fester in the dissident communities in China and overseas—an opinion for which one risks one's freedom, and possibly even one's life, becomes precious and unassailable to a degree that has become largely outmoded in the West, except among those labeled eccentric or obsessive.

While the Internet remains a sensitive forum for debate, and a fertile producer of political prison fodder, on the artistic front China seems to have liberalized greatly in recent years, with many artists gaining popularity, at least among Western clientele, for incorporating sly political or social references into their works. However, clear boundaries remain evident. Pop portraits of Mao Zedong might be allowed, but cheeky depictions of Deng Xiaoping or Jiang Zeming apparently remain out of bounds. As recently as 1994, a bumptious artist named Yan Zhengxue, head of the Artist's Village in Beijing's Palace Garden, found himself in a Reform Through Labor Camp in the Great Northern Wilderness. And in the same year, members of the same art commune, the poet Huang Xiang and his wife, were detained for a month under brutal conditions in a Shelter & Investigation center.

For Huang, this was merely the latest of a series of arrests that put him in custody for a total of twelve years, including two stints on death row before being granted reprieves. Huang finally came to the U.S. in 1997 and applied for political asylum, a process featured movingly in the PBS documentary, *A Well-Founded Fear* in May 2000. A resident of Tenafly, New Jersey for most of his exile, Huang is now on his way to Pittsburgh under the auspices of the Paris-based International Parliament of Writers, which arranges for exiled authors to be hosted through a Cities of Asylum program.

For an artist such as Huang Xiang, art and politics have proved inseparable. During the Cultural Revolution he was a member of Guizhou's Yeya Salon, which debated China's backwardness in civil and human rights, and he is credited as the first person to post big character posters during the Democracy Wall movement in 1978–79. He tends toward a radical and emotive style, as a result of which he is commonly referred to as the Beast Poet of China. One of his poetry collections, immediately banned in China, was entitled, *Huang Xiang, A Brute, Drinking Crazily but Never Drunk*.

This new bilingual edition of Huang Xiang's poetry provides an English reader-

Poet Huang Xiang (far right) with his wife, Zhang Ling, and translator Andrew Emerson.

ship with its first comprehensive introduction to Huang's work, and an opportunity to understand what Chinese authorities have found so threatening. The poems date from the four decades between 1962 to 2002, and cover a range of political issues, from China's Cultural Revolution to the destruction of New York's Twin Towers, as well as personal issues such as Huang's abiding love for his wife and muse, Zhang Ling (also known as Qiuxiao Yulan) and life in exile.

In a poem dated to coincide with the death of Mao Zedong, and posted at Tiananmen Square in November 1978, Huang writes:

The tyrant of this era has fallen
From the pinnacle of unrighteous power
From the tip of a rusty bayonet
From the buckled backs of a generation
And within billions of gasping bleeding souls . . .

. . . With a bloody whip he measured
Space for spiritual freedom
He allowed no thoughts to be voiced
Not even the sound of a cough
He defined the space for living
Controlling man's yearnings, impulses and hopes
He concealed lookout-posts inside peoples' brains
To observe everyone's thoughts
And natural desires

In a poem from 1976 entitled "China You Can't Remain Silent," Huang Xiang writes:

Your children of this era have quietly said "Yes"
Your last chance has come, oh China
History is waiting for you
The whole world is intently calling and listening for you
To say one word—
"No!"

Here is a passage composed while Huang Xiang was detained in the Wang Wu Laogai Prison at the end of 1989:

Body ascends mounds of melting snow. Purification
Fresh grass Red clouds and sea water soak to the
Bone
Once again the shimmering light of fresh dew

Looks death in the eye

Huang is also capable of intensely lyrical passages such as this one from the 1970s:

In an instant I recall you, oh sea gull,
That day, you suddenly flew from the inner lack of my soul;
And the jade-green waves seemed carried off by your wings.
No more glint of the waves, just a layer of dryness and mud.

"Refusing Exile," a long poem that Huang Xiang composed in exile after being awoken by a night terror in July 1997, reflects the mixed emotions of a man forced to abandon his homeland:

. . . I am not a migrant nor a
Visitor nor supplicant
Yet in spite of myself I have rushed off to a strange
And enduring isolation
America's vast sky vastly
Oppresses me
Buildings with their fresh theme towering
Above this ant's head
Spread their wings high in the sky
The language of riches and foreignness
Shoots rapid-fire bursts of light . . .

. . . High walls and wire mesh reappear
Prison attracts me like a paradise
Jail guards and dogs smile at me
With liquid honey in their eyes
While the memory of cool fresh spring water
Dispels the heavy heat and lassitude of exile . . .

. . . My loneliness leans back to face
The past
Two creaking wooden door panels with carven flowers
Unhinged swing open towards me
I drown myself in the dark gloomy peace of
Bygone days
While struggling free of the suffering
I warmly recall the suffering
I am now obtaining freedom
And yet reject the freedom . . .

In his poem "New York Teas Guest," composed in 2001, Huang shows himself better acclimated to his new home:

. . . Suddenly a tea leaf is seen
From a man standing in the world financial center from out of a tea cup in the man's hands
Floating up from the depths of the cup
That tealeaf is me.
Floating up out of the world's chasm of greed and abyss of wealth
Stark naked I lose a lifetime of cares
Win the present freedom
To drink alone at leisure

Andrew Emerson might not seem a likely choice as translator of the first large-scale English translation of the works of this important Chinese poet. He is not a professional linguist, but learned Chinese while in the military, and resumed his acquaintance with the language decades later after his retirement from a career in business. But a mutual friend assured Huang Xiang that Emerson had "the soul of a poet," and this volume proves him an able and sensitive interpreter in a medium that defies perfect translation, and which in the case of Huang Xiang adds the challenges of unconventional form and syntax.

The poems might have benefited from occasional footnotes to highlight the events to which they relate, but Emerson provides a lengthy introduction to Huang's life and work, which combined with a preface by Jeffrey Kinkley and a forward by Huang himself, are very helpful in putting the poems in their political, historical and personal context. Great poetry, of course, has to be able to stand on its own—and Huang's does.

The bilingual format displays Emerson's faithfulness to the original, his aim modestly described in his introduction as, "to put the poems into good readable and understandable form so that the maximum number of people who read or hear them for the first time will be able to form accurate opinions of the man's style, scope and abilities as an author, as well as enjoy the poetry." It is much to the credit of Emerson, as well as to a quality in Huang Xiang's poems that transcends the boundaries of language, that such a modest aspiration should yield such a rewarding reading experience.