Guo Feixiong's Collected Works

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The Editors' Foreword

Mr. Guo Feixiong stands as one of the defining figures in China's democratic resistance movement. Whether through the unyielding courage he demonstrated during his year-long hunger strike, the leadership he displayed in the tumultuous Southern street protests, or the heartrending scenes of separation from his beloved wife, he has etched a heroic chapter into the annals of China's democratic struggle.

Following Guo Feixiong's third imprisonment, friends both overseas and within China sought to compile and publish his political essays, defense statements, open letters, and other writings. Overseas, Hu Ping, Zhu Rikun, Yang Zili, Wu Shaoping, Cao Yaxue, and others jointly established the Guo Feixiong Concern Group and launched a public fundraising campaign for the publication of The Collected Works of Guo Feixiong, raising a total of $4,000. Of this, $2,500 covered specific editorial expenses, while $1,500 funded publication costs. Due to the harsh domestic political climate, the primary editors could not be named publicly. Thus, Hu Ping, Yang Zili, and Wu Shaoping served as nominal chief editors, undertaking various editorial and proofreading tasks.

As Guo Feixiong himself remains incarcerated, his writings circulate online or among electronic communication networks. Consequently, the collected works represent only a partial selection of his representative pieces. This is particularly true for commentaries on Guo Feixiong by other authors, where omissions are inevitable. Given the editors' limited resources, textual errors may have slipped through. We welcome readers' corrections.

The Editors
May 2024

Introduction to Guo Feixiong

Guo Feixiong, whose real name is Yang Maodong, was born on August 2, 1966, in Gucheng County, Hubei Province. He is a Chinese human rights defender and independent writer. Guo Feixiong is his most commonly used online pseudonym. He graduated from the Department of Philosophy at East China Normal University in Shanghai in July 1988 and previously worked as a philosophy teacher. From 1993 to 2001, he primarily engaged in independent publishing before transitioning to writing as his primary source of livelihood. He participated in the 1989 student movement and is a key participant and leader of China's New Citizens Movement and the Southern Street Movement. He has been detained four times by Chinese Communist Party authorities for rights defense actions, advocating for Falun Gong, and demanding asset disclosure from CCP officials. Despite enduring repeated torture, beatings, and other persecution, he has fought uncompromisingly for human rights in China. Guo Feixiong remains incarcerated at Zhaoqing Prison in Guangdong Province, China.

Guo became involved in the civil rights movement in 2001. In late April 2005, he was detained for 15 days by the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau on suspicion of "gathering a crowd to disrupt social order" after applying to organize a protest march against Japanese right-wing groups.

In July 2005, as legal counsel for Beijing Shengzhi Law Firm, Guo traveled to Guangdong Province. By late July, he became involved in the Taishi Village recall incident and provided legal assistance. On the evening of September 13, he was criminally detained by the Panyu Public Security Bureau in Guangzhou and began a hunger strike in protest. While incarcerated, he petitioned Guangdong authorities regarding forced labor imposed on prisoners. He was released in December of that year. For his outstanding contributions to grassroots democratic operations in Taishi Village, he was named a 2005 Person of the Year by Asia Weekly.

Guo Feixiong also publicly defended Falun Gong practitioners against illegal persecution. In 2006, he staged a hunger strike to protest the beatings he suffered at a police station.

Following the August 2006 arrest of human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, Guo Feixiong actively sought his release and was subsequently detained by authorities on suspicion of "illegal business operations."During his secret detention, Guo Feixiong endured torture, including electric baton shocks to his genitals to extract confessions. In November 2007, he was sentenced to five years in prison and fined 40,000 yuan for "illegal business operations." He was sent to Meizhou Prison in Guangdong Province and released on September 12, 2011, after completing his sentence.

During the 2013 Southern Weekly New Year's issue incident, Guo organized citizen groups to support the magazine's editors. In April that year, citizens in eight Chinese cities staged street protests demanding officials disclose their assets, with Guo regarded as one of the organizers. On August 8, 2013, he was criminally detained on suspicion of "gathering crowds to disrupt public order." In November 2015, Guo Feixiong was sentenced to six years in prison on two charges: "assembling a crowd to disrupt order in public places" and "picking quarrels and provoking trouble." After his release in August 2019, Guo Feixiong went into hiding to evade surveillance, communicating with family and friends only online.

In January 2020, Guo Feixiong's wife, Zhang Qing, who had fled to the United States, was diagnosed with colon cancer. Guo sent an open letter to Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi, subsequently obtaining a passport. On January 28, 2021, while preparing to board a flight at Shanghai Pudong Airport to visit his terminally ill wife in the United States, Guo Feixiong was denied exit by border control on the grounds of "endangering national security." He immediately declared a hunger strike in protest and was subsequently arrested. After being secretly detained in Guangdong for a period, authorities gradually eased restrictions on his movements.

On November 29, 2021, Guo Feixiong again sent an open letter to Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, demanding that authorities allow him to travel to the United States to visit his critically ill wife. He received no response and was re-arrested on December 5 of the same year. Guo Feixiong's wife, Zhang Qing, passed away in Maryland, USA, on January 10, 2022. On January 12, 2022, Guo Feixiong was formally arrested on suspicion of inciting subversion of state power. In August 2022, it became known that he

was prosecuted for accepting foreign interviews and operating a website promoting constitutionalism. Guo Feixiong has been on a hunger strike since his arrest on December 5, 2021, causing severe damage to his health. After learning of his wife's death, he wrote a letter to her sister to arrange her final affairs. On May 11, 2023, Guo Feixiong was sentenced to eight years in prison for "inciting subversion of state power" and was later transferred to Zhaoqing Prison. While incarcerated, he continued his hunger strike to demand basic human rights, persisting until authorities granted him minimal humane treatment.

Guo Feixiong's courageous struggle for human rights has earned high praise from the Chinese and international human rights communities. Human rights defenders and prominent scholars, both domestically and internationally, have repeatedly signed joint letters demanding his release. The Irish human rights organization Front Line Defenders awarded him the Front Line Defenders Award in 2015. Overseas Chinese democracy and human rights groups have also honored him with several awards, recognizing his unyielding spirit in the struggle for democracy and human rights in China.

The Editors
May 2024






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Preface I: The Magnificent Guo Feixiong

Hu Ping

On August 2, 2023, Guo Feixiong celebrated his 57th birthday in prison.

This marked his fifth imprisonment. The reasons for his previous four arrests were absurd enough, but this latest detention is beyond belief—so preposterous it defies imagination.

This time, Guo Feixiong was arrested for attempting to travel to the United States to visit his wife, Zhang Qing, who is terminally ill with cancer. That the Chinese Communist authorities denied Guo permission to visit his gravely ill wife was already deeply unethical and inhumane. Yet they went further, detaining Guo. While many assumed he would be released after a few days, the authorities instead sentenced him to an astonishing eight years in prison. The authorities have charged Guo Feixiong with the fabricated crime of "inciting subversion of state power": seeking to travel abroad to visit his dying wife has somehow become "inciting subversion of state power"! Such absurdity truly defies the imagination of any rational human being.

I first took notice of Guo Feixiong during the July 2005 rights defense movement by villagers in Taishi Village, Guangdong. This grassroots campaign in a small village captured global attention, partly because several intellectuals participated—Guo Feixiong among them. The Taishi Village movement stands as a milestone in China's grassroots rights defense efforts. Guo Feixiong and others set an example of intellectuals joining forces with ordinary villagers to launch large-scale collective resistance. In October, Beijing Spring published Guo Feixiong's "Overview of the Taishi Village Democratic Recall and Relay Hunger Strike Movement." I responded with a commentary titled "Resolutely Supporting the Taishi Villagers' Rights Defense Struggle."

On May 11, 2006, U.S. President George W. Bush met at the White House with several Chinese human rights activists, including Yu Jie, Wang

Yi, and Li Baiguang. Guo Feixiong, who was also visiting the U.S. at the time, was not invited to this meeting. This decision sparked considerable controversy online. Subsequently, Yu Jie, Wang Yi, and Guo Feixiong all traveled to New York to attend events. Several friends and I invited Yu Jie, Wang Yi, and Guo Feixiong to meet in person for discussions. Guo Feixiong and Wang Yi accepted, but Yu Jie declined, so the gathering did not materialize. Subsequently, we spoke privately with Guo Feixiong. When someone expressed dissatisfaction about his exclusion from the White House meeting, Guo Feixiong stated he would not discuss the matter. After this incident, Guo Feixiong and I maintained regular contact via phone and email. I noticed he never brought it up again, nor did I ever see him publicly criticize Yu Jie or Wang Yi. I never heard him speak of personal grudges or disputes within the democracy movement circle. He always focused on major issues, principles, and action plans. His magnanimity commands profound respect.

During that private conversation with Guo Feixiong, several friends urged him to stay abroad, warning that returning to China was too dangerous. Guo Feixiong firmly insisted he must go back, no matter the peril. After returning to China, he faced relentless and brutal suppression by the authorities. Friends again advised him to leave the country. He replied, "I won't leave. If I leave, I won't be able to come back."

Upon his return, Guo Feixiong immediately threw himself into rights defense struggles. In August, when human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng was arrested, Guo actively worked for his rescue. On September 30, the Guangzhou Public Security Bureau criminally detained Guo Feixiong on charges of "illegal business operations."Overseas democracy activists promptly issued an open letter expressing strong support, calling on people from all walks of life to lend a helping hand to Guo Feixiong and his wife and children, who had been illegally detained by the Chinese Communist Party. In just over ten days, donations totaling more than $8,000 were received. The police's primary basis for accusing Guo Feixiong of "illegal business operations" was that he had published the book Shenyang Political Earthquake in Liaoning in 2001. On January 20, 2007, Guo Feixiong was transferred to a detention center in Liaoning Province. At that time, Li Keqiang served as the provincial party secretary of Liaoning. On January 29, Wang Juntao and I, as alumni of Peking University, published an open letter

addressed to Li Keqiang, urging him to instruct investigators to strictly adhere to the law and refrain from subjecting Guo Feixiong to extrajudicial violence, torture, or abuse. One month later, Liaoning police traveled to Guo Feixiong's home in Guangdong and showed his wife, Zhang Qing, a video recording of Guo in the Liaoning detention center. They claimed to understand the family's fear that Guo might be subjected to torture and coercion in Liaoning, and thus brought this video specifically to prove that Guo had not been tortured or abused there. This approach by the Liaoning police was unprecedented. It may indicate that Li Keqiang had read our letter and instructed investigators to refrain from torture and abuse. However, shortly thereafter, Guo Feixiong revealed during a meeting with his lawyer that he had been subjected to brutal torture and forced confessions in Liaoning. This leaves only two possibilities: either the videotape was a hoax, or another powerful faction was brutally persecuting Guo Feixiong while Li Keqiang and others were powerless to intervene. The latter possibility seems more likely. In November of the same year, Guo Feixiong was sentenced to five years in prison for "illegal business operations."

In September 2011, Guo Feixiong was released after serving his sentence and immediately resumed his rights defense activism. In January 2013, Guo Feixiong participated in street demonstrations supporting the Southern Weekly incident. Holding a placard reading "Freedom of the Press, Constitutional Democracy" and delivering speeches, he elevated what began as sympathy and support for the Southern Weekly case into a comprehensive civic political demand. This transformed the street gathering into a landmark event directly advocating for freedom and democracy.

This is Guo Feixiong. He consistently stands at the forefront of human rights struggles, and through his efforts, he imbues collective resistance with clearer ideals and greater significance, elevating it to a higher level.

In April of that year, rights defenders in eight cities, including Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Wuhan, and Changsha, launched street protests demanding public disclosure of officials' assets and urging the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Authorities identified Guo Feixiong as one of the organizers and coordinators. He was criminally detained on August 8 and later sentenced to six years in prison on two charges: "gathering a crowd to disrupt public

order" and "picking quarrels and provoking trouble." On the day of his court trial, diplomatic officials from the embassies of the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other countries attended to express solidarity.

Guo Feixiong suffered brutal abuse in prison. His sister, Yang Maoping, visited him multiple times and observed his health deteriorating rapidly. Family members repeatedly requested medical examinations for Guo, only to be met with harsh refusals. This followed his two-and-a-half-year detention in a detention center without a single outdoor exercise session. Such prolonged, deliberate abuse amounts to nothing less than slow murder. This cannot stem solely from the malice of individual guards but must originate from directives at the highest levels. Since Xi Jinping took office, authorities have implemented an operation dubbed "flag-pulling," targeting prominent human rights activists across various fields with severe crackdowns. Guo Feixiong's ordeal stands as a glaring example.

News of Guo Feixiong's severe abuse and life-threatening condition in prison sparked intense international outrage. Professor Ai Xiaoming of Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou issued an "Urgent Appeal for Immediate Medical Diagnosis and Treatment for Guo Feixiong," which garnered 1,360 signatures within a week. International human rights organizations also lodged strong protests. Professor Ai Xiaoming spearheaded a relay hunger strike, drawing responses from numerous individuals both domestically and abroad. Guo Feixiong's wife, Zhang Qing, flew from Texas to New York to stage a hunger strike outside the United Nations headquarters in solidarity with her husband, who was protesting his humiliating treatment through a hunger strike in prison. She delivered a letter of protest to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights via Human Rights in China.

On August 7, 2019, Guo Feixiong was released after serving his sentence. Post-release, his movements were strictly monitored, and even his attempts to communicate with the outside world were met with relentless obstruction. Yet despite these circumstances, Guo Feixiong continued to write numerous articles and commentaries, publishing them overseas despite the risks.

When writing about Guo Feixiong, one cannot omit his wife, Zhang

Qing. After Guo's first imprisonment in September 2006, their two children faced discrimination in Guangzhou and were denied access to regular schooling. Zhang Qing was forced to flee to Thailand in 2009 with her children—one aged 12 and the other just 5. Later, with assistance from Fu Xiqiu's China Aid Association, she eventually made her way to the United States. After Zhang Qing settled in the United States, I called her immediately. We have maintained contact ever since. In January 2012, Beijing Spring awarded Guo Feixiong the Freedom Pioneer Award. Zhang Qing traveled from Midland, Texas, with her children to New York to accept the award on Guo Feixiong's behalf. In May 2016, when Zhang Qing staged a hunger strike outside the United Nations in New York, we organized events together. Resilient and self-reliant, she learned English and accounting after arriving in the U.S., completed her master's degree, and pursued doctoral coursework. Single-handedly supporting her family, she raised both children to adulthood with profound maternal love and extraordinary perseverance, sending them both to university. Whenever I asked if she needed help, she always insisted she could manage. Only once, after moving from Texas to Maryland, did she call my wife for advice on choosing schools for her children.

In early 2020, Zhang Qing suspected she had contracted COVID-19. By year's end, she was diagnosed with advanced colon cancer and underwent major surgery. Guo Feixiong appealed to Chinese authorities, pleading for permission to travel to the U.S. to be with her. On January 28, 2021, as Guo prepared to depart for America, he was intercepted at Shanghai Pudong Airport. Guo Feixiong announced a hunger strike in protest and was immediately taken away by police, losing contact with the outside world. During the subsequent period, Guo Feixiong established communication with us through an encrypted Telegram group. Deeply distressed, he intensified his efforts to apply for exit while frequently calling and texting us, doing everything in his power to save Zhang Qing's life. On November 29, 2021, Zhang Qing issued an open letter titled "My Life Is Nearing Its Final Stage," pleading for Guo Feixiong to accompany her in the United States as she battled illness. Just as Guo was making every effort to secure his travel to the U.S., we received a text message from him on December 5 stating, "I have been arrested."Upon hearing the news, a group of Chinese

and international advocates for human rights and the rule of law in China immediately issued a joint statement expressing concern for the current plight of Guo Feixiong and Zhang Qing. The U.S. Department of State also voiced similar concerns.

On January 10, 2022, Zhang Qing passed away at Holy Cross Hospital in Maryland. She never got to see Guo Feixiong again before her death; only her children were by her side.

On January 16, the "Zhang Qing Memorial Group," formed by friends and colleagues in the U.S., held an online memorial service one week after her passing. While honoring Zhang Qing's remarkable life as a mother and wife, the group called on the Chinese authorities to release Guo Feixiong on humanitarian grounds, allowing him to freely travel to the U.S. to mourn with his children and handle her final arrangements. However, on January 12, the Chinese authorities formally arrested Guo Feixiong on suspicion of "inciting subversion of state power."On May 11, 2023, Guo Feixiong was sentenced to eight years in prison and three years of deprivation of political rights at the Guangzhou Intermediate People's Court. Guo appealed the verdict. On June 26, 2023, his appeal was rejected, and the original sentence was upheld. He was subsequently imprisoned in Sihui Prison, Guangdong, where his health has steadily deteriorated.

Over the past two decades, Guo Feixiong has endured multiple imprisonments and various forms of torture, suffering immense physical and mental torment. Yet he remains unwavering in his commitment, dedicating himself tirelessly and risking his life to advance freedom, human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and constitutional progress in China. Guo Feixiong stands as a banner figure in China's contemporary human rights and democracy movement, a true hard man in every sense. Guo Feixiong possesses not only formidable capacity for action, organizational skills, and moral courage, but also exceptional intellectual prowess and eloquence. He has authored numerous writings, including defense statements and appeals drafted during his trials. Guo Feixiong has profoundly and lucidly articulated the ideals and principles of constitutional democracy while simultaneously proposing a series of strategic and tactical approaches to advance the cause of human rights and democracy in China.

Guo Feixiong has committed his deeply considered thoughts to paper

and achieved extraordinary feats of courage. We bear the responsibility to ensure his ideas and deeds are widely disseminated. While the authorities seek to silence his existence through imprisonment, we must ensure his presence shines even brighter.

Preface II: The Saint of Unity of Knowledge and Action, Pursuing Constitutionalism

Zhang Qianfan

I never met Feixiong in person. After his release in 2019, he briefly visited Beijing. We had planned to meet, but due to tight surveillance and communication difficulties, we unfortunately missed each other. After his release, he devoted himself to reading, and his advocacy became remarkably moderate—perhaps even more so than mine. I thus assumed he would avoid further trouble. Yet unexpectedly, pandemic lockdowns followed, then his wife's critical illness. His persistent plea to travel abroad for her care went unmet; even this most basic humanitarian request was denied. When he subsequently published a slightly more radical open letter, he faced another harsh sentence.

Though we've never met, our hearts have long been in harmony. In my eyes, Feixiong has always been a saint who practices what he preaches, unwavering in his pursuit of constitutional democracy. I first learned of him around 2005 during the Taishi Village incident, though my impression was faint at the time—I myself had only begun shifting my focus from pure academia to social events after the Sun Zhigang case in 2003. The 2013 Southern Weekly incident regarding the "constitutional dream" left a profound impression on me. Among the organizers of the solidarity campaign, he received the harshest sentence—a confirmation of his status as a civic action leader. In prison, he remained unyielding, fighting for basic dignity and rights at the cost of his life, undertaking a hunger strike lasting over 100 days in 2016. Deeply concerned about his health, I joined fellow academics, including Brother Xiaoshu, in commissioning several senior scholars to co-sign a letter delivered to the Guangzhou prison authorities via his lawyer. That era was more lenient than today, and Guangzhou authorities were relatively open-minded—the letter proved highly effective. I heard he successfully transferred to a different prison and gained reading privileges, devouring numerous books over the next two years.

As Brother Xiaoshu aptly described him, Feixiong is a thinker and doer,

both in intellect and in courage. He acted with boldness, steadfastness, and unyielding resolve, while his thinking was agile and meticulous. Authorities dread such individuals most! After his release, we occasionally corresponded. Though our assessments of the political climate weren't always aligned, I quickly recognized Feixiong as a profoundly thoughtful person. Often, just a few words from him would reveal a penetrating insight, expressed with such conciseness and sharpness that it left one amazed and pondering long afterward. In the spring of 2020, he proposed launching a series of questionnaires titled "China's Conscientious Intellectuals on Constitutional Democracy." Feixiong, the organizer of thought and action, had returned! His call to action, the questionnaire he drafted, and his commentary on several responses all revealed his profound and comprehensive understanding of constitutional democracy. His defense statement after being arrested once again showcased the noble bearing of a philosopher—profoundly wise, courageous, and deeply compassionate. The phrase "South Guo, North Xu" (a reference to two legendary liars who deceived their way into government positions) rings true. On Chinese soil, few possess such a rare combination of insight, drive, and organizational skill.

Imprisoned four times over nineteen years, enduring immense suffering each time, yet emerging unchanged—as if nothing had happened—Fei Xiong's resolve reached its ultimate height! He truly embodied the spirit of "though nine deaths, no regret" for the future of constitutional China. Amidst shifting tides and worsening circumstances, I heard he had once again embarked on a prolonged hunger strike. This time, however, there was little we could do to help him. We could only entrust his lawyer to convey the words "the road ahead is long and arduous," urging him to stop while he still could. He seemed to understand and agree. The timely compilation and publication of his collected works overseas now is most timely. May this publication bring him some solace within his confinement and allow the world to better appreciate his constitutional ideals and patriotic spirit.

Foreword: Guo Feixiong, Hero of Civil Rights

Xiao Shu

The historical scroll of the civil rights movement is unfolding in China today. Just as the American civil rights movement had Martin Luther King Jr., China's current civil rights movement has also produced numerous iconic figures. Guo Feixiong, the prisoner of conscience who was put on trial by the Chinese government on Friday for "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order," is one of them.

If the American civil rights movement fought for the rights of tens of millions of African Americans, today's Chinese civil rights movement does not merely advocate for a specific ethnic group. It strives for the rights of the entire populace—virtually every Chinese citizen. Not only are those outside the system powerless, but even those within it, including those in positions of authority, lose their legal protections the moment they fall from grace in power struggles, becoming vulnerable to arbitrary treatment. Nearly every Chinese person belongs to the "black" tier of the rights hierarchy, facing conditions worse than those of African Americans in the past: deprived not only of freedom, but also of equality and justice.

This is precisely why Guo Feixiong joined the civil rights movement. Born in 1966 in Gucheng, Hubei, as Yang Maodong, he graduated from East China Normal University in Shanghai in 1988. As a graduate of a prestigious university, he could have enjoyed a promising career as a compliant tool of the system. Even after leaving the establishment, his venture as a private publisher proved highly successful, enabling him to purchase a luxury apartment in Guangzhou's prime district. Yet in 2001, at the peak of his career, he chose to abandon all this and resolutely embark on the thorny path of the civil rights movement.

Beginning in 2005, as a legal advisor for Beijing Zhisheng Law Firm, Guo Feixiong traveled south to Guangdong, participating in rights defense movements in Nanhai, Foshan, Panyu, and other areas, forging an inseparable bond with Guangdong's civil society. Among these, the recall of village officials in Taishi Village, Panyu, was the most sensational.

Following severe financial irregularities, villagers demanded the removal of the village committee suspected of corruption. However, the district government deployed over a thousand police officers to suppress the protests, arresting dozens of villagers and escalating the situation. As the legal representative commissioned by the rights-defending villagers, Guo Feixiong mobilized numerous elites from intellectual, media, and legal circles to engage in the case. This pioneered the introduction of civil society forces into rights defense incidents, initiating intense political maneuvering against the system at the grassroots governance level. The rights defense movement, which began with the 2003 death of college student Sun Zhigang under the detention and deportation system, thus reached its peak in political rights defense.

This shift toward political rights advocacy effectively marked the dawn of a civil rights movement. Around the same time as the Taishi Village incident, Beijing witnessed the emergence of Gongmeng (Public Alliance), founded by Xu Zhiyong, Teng Biao, and Guo Yushang, while in Shandong, barefoot lawyer Chen Guangcheng was imprisoned for his rights advocacy work. These three major rights defense events occurring in rapid succession made 2005 the inaugural year of China's political rights advocacy—the year China's civil rights movement began. Guo Feixiong was the earliest to define political rights advocacy, shape its momentum, and serve as a "cannon fodder-level" direct action participant.

He suffered brutal retaliation and paid a heavy price for his actions. From April 2005 to the present, he has been criminally detained four times on charges including "gathering crowds to disrupt public order." His third detention resulted in a five-year prison sentence. He endured over 200 interrogations, including a grueling 13-day, 13-night sleep deprivation marathon. He faced beatings, hair-pulling torture, and even electric shocks. These extreme trials—real, not cinematic—aimed to crush his will, force his submission, and compel his withdrawal from the civil rights movement.

Yet his tormentors clearly underestimated his resilience. Far from yielding or bowing down, he grew more determined with each setback, ultimately setting an astonishing record of 186 consecutive days on hunger strike. Upon his release in 2011, he immediately plunged back into grassroots activism, joining fellow Guangdong civic society activists in

building strongholds and fighting fierce battles. The most iconic moment was his street solidarity during the 2013 Southern Weekly New Year's editorial incident that shook the world. This street demonstration marked China's first successful political assembly experiment since 1989—a bold attempt by citizens to actively exercise their political rights as sovereign individuals. Guo Feixiong was the undisputed leader of this movement. He then immediately organized a nationwide petition urging the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. He also orchestrated the "Eight-City Flash Mob," dispatching small teams to eight cities for a touring campaign, once again setting a new benchmark for citizen political assemblies.

As a civil rights activist, Guo Feixiong's fearlessness and resolve are unmatched, but his clear-headed rationality is even more remarkable. This was vividly demonstrated during the Southern Weekly New Year's editorial incident. On the morning of January 7, 2013, street protesters had barely gathered when they accepted police advice to withdraw from Guangzhou Avenue and the entrance of Southern Media Group, retreating entirely to the sidewalk corridors. Guangzhou Avenue remained as unobstructed as ever. The sidewalk corridors never became impassable due to overcrowding, and the three-day street assembly proceeded peacefully and orderly throughout. This has been corroborated by numerous eyewitness accounts, including testimonies from editors and journalists at Southern Media. All of this was inseparable from Guo Feixiong's efforts. From the outset of organizing the street gatherings, he clearly defined the objectives and boundaries of the actions. He also played a direct role on-site, proactively urging protesters to leave by 5 PM on January 7. As Guo Feixiong later stated: "Our political purpose is serious, our action goals are restrained, and our operational methods are open, fair, and respectful." The subsequent "Eight-City Flash Mob" protests similarly maintained limited objectives, peaceful means, and high restraint, adhering to the internationally standard park-sidewalk activity model. They did not disrupt public order.

The facts prove Guo Feixiong to be not only courageous but also wise. Though subjected to immense suffering and narrowly escaping death multiple times, he harbors no hatred, no bitterness, and no obsession. He maintains noble humanity and a healthy mindset, transcending the

adversarial mindset and the philosophy of zero-sum struggle. He resolutely champions civil rights, yet his actions are not, as authorities maliciously speculate, driven by revenge, power grabs, or subversion. To him, such conjecture is an insult—nothing more than "judging the hearts of freedom-loving democrats by the standards of totalitarian authoritarians." He holds a religious-like faith in civil rights and constitutional governance, pursuing an ideal for the land rather than fleeting personal power. He resolutely advocated civic action and led by example, yet simultaneously emphasized self-regulation and the balance between liberty and order. He was a steadfast opposition figure, but above all, a responsible and constructive one. His focus lay in demonstrating peaceful, civilized, and rational dissent—setting an exemplary model for China's inevitable future political transition—rather than embracing scorched-earth tactics or fomenting chaos.

Both are civil rights movements, yet the institutional environments in China and the United States are fundamentally different. America's constitutional system is compatible with civil rights; the movement did not oppose the system but rather deepened democracy. Thus, Martin Luther King Jr. was not alone—he had the cooperation of the highest authorities, including Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, as well as Congress and the Supreme Court. This made it easier for the American civil rights movement to build momentum. China, however, presents the exact opposite scenario. Guo Feixiong steadfastly trusts human nature, including the humanity within the system. This is certainly correct. Yet it cannot be denied that no matter how resilient human nature may be, it cannot alter the rigidity of a dictatorial regime. Individuals within the system may indeed experience the moral awakening Guo envisions, but the dictatorial regime itself offers no viable path forward. It is fundamentally incapable of coexisting with human nature, especially with civil rights. This inherent contradiction dooms China's civil rights movement to a path fraught with hardship and tragedy. The dictatorial system tolerates no challenges, accepts no pressure, and brooks no accumulation of social capital—including intellectual and moral capital—stifling it at the earliest stage. China's civil rights movement can only rise again and again after each fall, fight on despite repeated defeats. To call China's civil rights cause and constitutional transition the most arduous undertaking in human history is no exaggeration.

To dare commit one's finite life to this nearly infinite transformation requires astonishing perseverance and willpower. Guo Feixiong is not only fearless and resolute but also possesses remarkable equilibrium and lucid rationality. Only with such individuals can China's transformation proceed with the utmost determination and stability, minimize societal costs, overcome unfounded fears of an uncontrolled transition, and build nationwide confidence in its success.

If national sovereignty, people's livelihoods, and civil rights have been China's fundamental issues over the past century, then after achieving national independence and basic sustenance for its people, China's most pressing problem is civil rights—a subject it urgently needs to catch up on. We must enable hundreds of millions of disenfranchised citizens to break free from systemic exclusion. They must cease to be represented by others, usurped, discriminated against, or humiliated. Instead, they must become true sovereigns. Only when they possess genuine sovereignty will they develop a sense of belonging and responsibility toward the nation. Only then can this nation become a true community, achieving genuine peace, reconciliation, cooperation, and a shared future. Otherwise, nothing can be resolved. Technical solutions can at best provide partial relief, and even that effect diminishes until it reaches its limit. Only by starting with civil rights can we hope for a fundamental solution. We have now reached this critical moment.

Guo Feixiong once declared: "Those who oppose constitutionalism are traitors to the nation." Similarly, those who persecute Guo Feixiong and his comrades are also traitors to the nation. The authoritarian regime confronting Guo Feixiong and his peers is indeed formidable. Yet the crux lies in this regime now facing a more formidable force—a trend. This trend is the trend of the civil rights movement. This trend is the awakening of hundreds of millions of disenfranchised people. This trend is the rise of hundreds of millions of disenfranchised people to become sovereign citizens. Unarmed individuals like Guo Feixiong may be physically weak, but their ideals and aspirations align with this trend. Those who are powerful in the secular sense should not ignore this fact.

November 30, 2014

Xiao Shu, whose real name is Chen Min, was formerly a senior commentator for Southern Weekly and an editorial board member of Yanhuang Weekly.

Part One

Courtroom Plea

My Fundamental Political Position and Life Philosophy: A Vision for Revolution

(Court Defense Statement)

This marks my third imprisonment. The charges against me have evolved from "illegal publishing" in my first case, to "gathering crowds to disrupt public order" in the second, and now culminate in "inciting subversion" in this third instance. It is foreseeable that I will ultimately be convicted of "inciting subversion." This rhythmic progression mirrors the unfolding of grand historical events, steadily penetrating to the core of deep-seated structures.

Part One: The Political Charges Against Me Are Utterly Groundless and Violate Public Order and Morals

The Guangzhou Municipal People's Procuratorate's indictment alleges my actions violated Article 105(2) of the Criminal Law. The legal factual basis cited is: dozens of articles I wrote since 2002 advocating for freedom and democracy, and my establishment of the "World Constitutional Democracy Forum" website in 2020. The indictment thus concludes that I attacked and defamed China's political system, incited subversion of state power, and sought to overthrow the socialist system.

First, I must state unequivocally that from my initial participation in the student movement in December 1986 to the present day, my political convictions and ideals have remained unchanged: to achieve genuine freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in China. This constitutes the original, fundamental, and ultimate purpose behind all my social, intellectual, academic, and political activities.

In the first two instances, I was essentially subjected to political imprisonment due to my political activities. However, in this third instance, I am being held accountable for my two decades of intellectual and academic pursuits, prosecuted as a representative figure of "hostile forces." Indeed, the public dissemination of my writings and the websites I founded are objective

facts. As is widely known, these intellectual and academic endeavors represent the upright exercise of my fundamental civil and political rights—freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and academic freedom. It is also widely acknowledged that the objective impact of these activities has been profoundly positive: they have widely disseminated universal values, enlightened both citizens and officials yearning for truth about human rights and humanitarianism, and undeniably contributed to awakening a generation's consciousness of sovereignty and rights.

Across Chinese official and civilian circles, there is near-unanimous recognition that, given my longstanding stance and objective societal impact, I am widely acknowledged as one of the principal representatives of the moderate right wing within mainland China's political spectrum. For decades, I have consistently sought to enlighten the greatest number, unite all compatriots, and achieve an ideological alliance across all classes. Confrontation, subversion, or the notion of one side's downfall leading to another's rise have never been my inclination; A pluralistic coexistence, a grand reconciliation, and an almost idealistic "harmony among people" have been my lifelong dream, my original aspiration, and my true intention. This is also the legitimate subjective purpose behind my intellectual and academic endeavors. Within my intellectual and academic propositions, a peaceful and rational leftism, a genuine socialism, is an indispensable component of the modern society's pluralistic and balanced structure. The optimal evolutionary path for a constitutional democratic political system is peaceful and involves a moderate transition. Any politician, political force, or regime that sincerely strives for the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation and genuinely embraces the ideal of constitutional democracy may actively participate in, capitalize on the momentum to lead, or gain a legitimate electoral mandate to steer the political transition and constitutional revolution of their time. In my intellectual and academic blueprint, all rational elements within existing institutions, regimes, and political forces should be integrated into a comprehensive innovation of a new political civilization, becoming its effective and substantive components. Compared to the grand vision I admire—one that, like Confucius, Aristotle, and Hegel, "embraces all original essence within reality"—the narrow-minded schemes of overthrowing regimes or toppling systems are truly insignificant! In works

like The Complexity of Deng Xiaoping and The Fundamental Path to Self-Rescue Lies in Political Awakening, I adopted a literary approach of "criticizing first, then urging virtue" toward major political figures. This stems primarily from my deep compassion for humanity, and secondarily employs a traditional Chinese motivational strategy: "Everyone can become a sage like Yao and Shun." The prosecution's accusation that I engaged in "spreading rumors, defamation, and slander" against individuals and the system is itself a flagrant violation of social order and public morality. It ignores the existence of China's millennia-old cultural traditions, creating an extremely ugly legal flaw.

However, a deeper analysis reveals that framing my moderate right-wing academic activities as a capital offense reflects the utter exhaustion of the minds behind the indictment. Even within China's forty-year history of suppressing free thought and forces under the guise of "maintaining stability," this is exceptionally rare. Their refusal to engage in dialogue while creating enemies is grotesque and bizarre. Such abnormal behavior must conceal sinister motives.

Since the verdict was predetermined, why should I enumerate here the indictment's inversion of right and wrong, its conflation of facts, its fabrication of charges, and the pathetic, pitiful darkness of its motives?

In this courtroom saturated with injustice and political persecution, I stand to publicly articulate the political and existential ideals of our generation. The courtroom itself is a forum for constitutional democracy. My mission today is to speak from this frontline platform—to voice the aspirations of our generation of sovereign citizens rising to prominence, to reveal the truth and reality of Chinese society, and to proclaim the most urgent and fundamental political and existential truths our nation desperately needs.

Let me be clear: my true purpose in speaking for a generation is to inspire and cultivate the inner spiritual strength that will guide the Chinese nation through the inevitable political transformation and the construction of political civilization. I am also acutely aware that this intellectual advocacy carries immense weight. It must not descend into mere shouting or superficial statements, but must possess a substantial discursive quality—a depth of truth and life commensurate with the profound heritage of Chinese

civilization and the tragic yet heroic history of China's five generations of democratic movements. The philosopher remains free even in chains, not only because he transcends external constraints through independent thought, but also because he overcomes the inner shackles of worldly grudges, self-interest, and calculation, ascending toward the sacred realm of humanitarian ideals and cosmic truth. Standing at this foremost podium, I shall speak from my own extreme life experiences and reflections, from the theoretical framework honed through decades of trial and error, to articulate the ideals, truths, and moral heights our generation embraces and upholds. Accept or reject me—let the evidence speak! Judge me or condemn me—let the Spring and Autumn Annals be the sole arbiter!

Part Two: The Deep Considerations Behind My Persistent Hunger Strikes

From 2005 to 2019, I was criminally detained four times and sentenced twice. In these politically motivated injustices, I endured a total of 11 years and 123 days of imprisonment. During this period, I was transferred through six detention centers and held in three prisons (if this current detention is included, by the time of today's trial, I will have endured five criminal detentions, been transferred through nine detention centers, and spent 12 years and 279 days in confinement). I have endured hundreds of relentless interrogations by dozens of police officers and stability maintenance officials. During this period, I undertook six hunger strikes totaling 297 days (this current hunger strike is my seventh, with its duration counted separately, now reaching 512 days). Why do I persist in hunger strikes, and why do they grow increasingly prolonged? Regarding this question, I do possess deeper moral and philosophical considerations—though they are neither mysterious nor incomprehensible.

Hunger strikes are a common form of peaceful resistance in freedom movements worldwide. They possess significant spiritual power: moving people's conscience through personal suffering, proclaiming the moral nobility of freedom and democracy to all sectors of society, and inspiring moral courage in activists. My initial motivation for hunger strikes was to resist unjust arrest and to proclaim and bear witness to the purity and integrity of the ideals of freedom and democracy. A hunger strike by a political prisoner is not an abnormal act; indeed, it would be somewhat abnormal for

a political prisoner facing brutal and vicious political persecution not to engage in such resistance. The post-totalitarian stability maintenance apparatus subjected me to endless interrogations and torment, aiming to crush my psyche with extreme pressure in peacetime, thereby forcing me to abandon my ideals, withdraw from action, and extinguish the moral appeal of my steadfastness to a generation of freedom-seeking idealists. The core motivation for my hunger strike lies in defending my integrity, demonstrating my steadfast resilience and unyielding righteousness, and through the ascetic discipline unique to Eastern civilization, actively testing the limits of my physical and mental endurance to continually strengthen my inner spiritual fortitude. I have never admired the ugly flip side of Chinese culture: compromising one's principles for the sake of survival, waiting for a better day. I choose to live fully and with dignity in the present moment. I have always stood tall in prison, and I shall stand tall in death. The noble integrity of ancient Chinese men and the courageous spirit of Western nobility are the exemplary characters I sincerely admire and aspire to. My defining trait is this: any moral value I genuinely believe in and hold dear, I must embody with my own life.

The toll of prolonged hunger strikes is indeed heavy: my weight steadily declined, and multiple internal organs suffered damage. During my first hunger strike, exceeding 40 days, severe dizziness intensified, my stomach pulled in my abdomen, and I vomited incessantly. Later, during a 101-day fast, I effectively alleviated this major distress through intensified mental focus and Eastern internal energy cultivation—specifically, ordered deep breathing. Beyond promoting ideals of freedom and demonstrating my unwavering resolve, my prolonged fasts increasingly evolved into a philosophical practice exploring the limits of physical and mental endurance. Plato observed that those truly devoted to philosophy are, in essence, actively practicing death. I am a philosopher who has studied philosophy almost uninterruptedly for decades, actively cultivating my mind and character through philosophical practice. My hunger strike explorations indeed embody a philosophical essence—fusing the core teachings of China's Confucian, Mencian, Laozi, and Zhuangzi traditions; India's Buddhist philosophy and fasting practices; and ancient Greek and Roman Platonism and Stoic ethics into a holistic, life-affirming practice. By resisting the

confinement of iron bars to validate my spiritual freedom, and by bearing witness to the beauty of personal dignity and integrity alongside the purity of democratic ideals, I have experienced—even cultivated—a sacred state of mind transcending suffering, desire, and death. This constitutes the profound spiritual current within my prolonged, extreme fast. After my first hunger strike, I was astonished to discover that the walls before my eyes had grown whiter, and the sky bluer. As hunger strikes repeated, my emotions grew increasingly sincere and fervent, easily moved. My heart trembled at the chivalrous rescues and heartfelt solidarity among fellow freedom fighters. My vision seemed to expand ever wider and higher, my spirit increasingly drawn to reverence for ideals like "all under heaven are brothers," "embracing all human kin," and "uniting all civilizations' essence into one." I grew accustomed to disciplining myself with great compassion, impartiality, and magnanimity—embracing differing views while forgiving human frailties. Through this prolonged, holistic philosophical discipline of fasting, I keenly felt my soul's continuous evolution, layer upon layer of elevation and transcendence. My philosophical practice seemed to approach a pivotal point of assessment and validation. Should I one day suddenly face the reality of sacrificing my life for my ideals, I would embrace profound spiritual currents—the noble beauty of "standing tall in life and death," the sacred beauty of ascending to the heavens, and the profound emotional resonance of reuniting eternally with my wife, who sacrificed herself for freedom—and depart with serenity. The concept of "the beauty of moderation" struggles to capture the true essence of this aesthetics of suffering.

Part III: Navigating Millennial Political and Civilizational Transformations

After my release from prison in August 2019, I witnessed a sudden shift in the political landscape of mainland China, accumulating significant and far-reaching variables. This shift also concealed certain historical opportunities more conducive to political transformation.

Civil rights forces appeared subdued under severe suppression, yet their structural integrity remained intact. Meanwhile, a nationwide social-cultural consensus and transformative consciousness were incubating at an unprecedented scale. Through systematic reflection on the lessons of the past

decade's democracy and rights defense movement, I have come to deeply realize: while we achieved remarkable successes in effectively expanding the influence of the freedom camp, fostering a flat structure of grassroots forces, and driving change through progressively intensified actions, we also committed significant errors: We have placed excessive emphasis on legal battles and rights defense actions, overestimating the intellectual value of "enlightenment through action." Crucially, we have failed to provide a direct, systematic theoretical exposition and a diverse, competitive simulation design for our primary ideal goal—the locally adapted operational path and blueprint for a constitutional democratic system. This constitutes one of the foundational intellectual pillars for fostering national consensus and building a public political society during China's future political transition period. In the information age, ideas constitute the primary resource of social public life. Among these, original operational concepts adapted to practical needs represent a strategic scarcity for Chinese society as it advances toward political transformation. The democracy and rights defense movement must not confine itself to merely "producing" actions of freedom, forces of liberty, or enlightenment ideas about freedom. Our mission is to realize a pluralistic framework, achieve political transformation, and fully materialize the ideal of freedom across the Chinese land. This demands that we "produce" for China's changing society the pluralistic blueprint essential for a once-in-a-millennium political transition—a framework for governance. How this ultimately takes shape in practical implementation will be shaped by the convergence of historical forces and decided by the sovereign people.

Not only that, but this once-in-a-millennium political transformation also requires a deeper, more substantial new civilization and culture to serve as the soft environment that enables the new political system to sustain itself and grow. Having undergone decades of rapid economic growth and amassed immense economic power, Chinese society—propelled by the multidimensional forces of profound economic transformation, information revolution, and lifestyle shifts—is not only incubating political upheaval but also fostering a monumental shift in civilization and culture.As the vanguard of China's spiritual and cultural life, the Chinese democracy and rights movement bears the mission of leading this monumental shift in civilization and culture.The Chinese nation is a philosophical one. As a people who

venerate philosophical sages, respect philosophical truths about the cosmos and human values, and revere philosophical ways of life—whether engaged with the world or detached from it—the Chinese nation possesses a unique cultural psychology and ultimate value recognition. As is widely known, as free idealists who take the world as our responsibility and practice the unity of knowledge and action, we are essentially the continuation of China's traditional scholar-official class in contemporary society.We are not only immersed in a tradition of national cultural values from which we cannot extricate ourselves, but we also belong to the most fundamental, most authentic, and most resilient part of this tradition—a tradition that emphasizes revering and adhering to the Way, upholding and practicing the Way, while also stressing that "it is people who can promote the Way, not the Way that promotes people."According to the socially recognized division of labor within this tradition, the scholar-official class bears the civilizational responsibility of promoting the ideals of benevolence, disseminating poetry, books, rituals, and music, and helping to cultivate wholesome customs. Thus, this tradition effectively endows the scholar-official class with the highly active role of "shaping the moral character of society and the hearts of the people." In contemporary China, the counterpart to this scholar-official class is the active citizenry that pursues and practices universal political truths.As thinking individuals in action, we cannot abandon this highly active role as "shapers of society and human hearts"—a role expected of us by hundreds of millions of people, grounded in traditional cultural psychology and the social division of labor. In the process of political transition toward freedom and democracy, we must inspire individual citizens with moral courage and urge all citizens to shoulder comprehensive political and social responsibilities.Confronted by the brainwashing culture that fosters servile dependency and the distorted, materialistic, decadent trends in social psychology, we bear an even more solemn responsibility to help heal the nation's soul and reverse the erosion of moral standards. All this demands that we fulfill our vanguard duties in a more multidimensional way and proactively embrace the monumental transformation of civilization and culture.The philosophy of human value is the core origin of all civilizations and cultures, and the awakening of human value is the primary engine driving cultural transformation. The political transition and cultural

revolution of China, this colossal nation, demand a revolution in the philosophy of human value. This revolution will forge the core origin of a new civilization and culture, shaping the public spirit and moral foundation essential for political transformation and a free, democratic society.As the authentic inheritors of Chinese civilization and the bearers of universal liberal democratic ideals, we stand on an unprecedented spiritual high ground where East and West converge and the diversity of global civilizations coalesces. Drawing from the accumulated wisdom of a nation's arduous journey, we possess both the opportunity and the capacity to achieve philosophical originality. Our civilizational framework must begin by establishing the institutional framework of constitutional democracy and nurturing its practical implementation. Yet our civilizational vision extends far beyond individual political ambitions. Standing at the convergence of transformative shifts in information, daily life, politics, and thought, we possess a millennial opportunity to recreate the era of the Hundred Schools of Thought, revive the grandeur of the Tang Dynasty, and reimagine ancient Greek civilization—ultimately forging an entirely new classical civilization.Whether we can internalize this opportunity depends, of course, on our capacity to initiate a philosophical revolution on Chinese soil. We are confronting and embracing the millennial transformation of the Chinese nation from the heights of ultimate values and civilizational vision—this is precisely the uniqueness of our existence as pioneers who dedicate our entire lives to the ideal of freedom.

Part IV: My Fundamental Political Proposals

As widely recognized, both domestic and international trends have reached a critical juncture. At this juncture, our democracy and rights protection movement must articulate our fundamental political principles to hundreds of millions of compatriots and to the diverse forces—both existing and potential—within society. This demonstrates the direction we envision for China's future political transformation. If these principles indeed reveal theoretical and practical truths that align with the trends of the information age and China's domestic needs, I believe no obstacle can prevent their widespread dissemination. No obstacle can hinder the profound guiding force of truth in shaping China's future political transformation.

So, what are the fundamental political principles of China's democracy

and rights protection movement? What is the future political system for China that it has long explored and promoted, one that aligns with the trends of the information age and China's domestic needs?

Our fundamental political proposition can be systematically articulated as follows:

I. A pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy is the only political system capable of ensuring that the Chinese people remain masters of their own destiny for centuries, millennia, or even eternity, and of securing enduring social stability. It is also the sole path capable of helping contemporary Chinese society completely overcome its long-accumulated deep-seated crises. Pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy is the concrete realization of the noble ideal of freedom and a universal political truth applicable everywhere. Regardless of the anti-democratic, anti-freedom disturbances caused by totalitarian dictatorships and usurping regimes, any nation or people may endure; their ultimate trajectory is the correction of error by truth, and their final destination is the realization of political truth. No group or individual can prevent this political truth—pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy—from ultimately solidifying into a permanent political reality across the Chinese land.

A pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy system is the comprehensive integration of fundamental political principles and structures: "freedom under the rule of law," "democracy under the rule of law," "political separation of powers and checks and balances under the rule of law," "pluralistic competition among political groups under the rule of law," "federalism under the rule of law," "an efficient administrative management system under the rule of law," "a system for realizing human rights under the rule of law," "an economic welfare state system under the rule of law," and "social pluralistic self-governance under the rule of law."The dual archon electoral system, the flat structure of three coexisting assemblies, and eleven constitutional reforms of ancient Athens; the mixed polity of ancient Sparta and the Roman Republic; the legal civilization of the Roman Empire; the parliamentary system and judicial jury system of modern Britain; The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and its practical implementation, Germany's administrative rationality, the welfare state development of Nordic nations, and especially America's separation of

powers, federalism, and universal social self-governance—all these have contributed richly to the truth-bearing elements of this pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy. China's future political institutional development should deeply study and draw upon them as classic experiential cases.

On the other hand, future political institutional innovation in China must fully draw on the time-tested institutional essence of the Chinese nation's millennia-long political traditions. The Chinese nation stands among the most politically astute in the global community. This ingenuity is manifested in its historical creation of ancient riverine civilizations, the Western Zhou feudal system that freely and effectively governed hundreds of states, the centralized commandery-county system after the Qin dynasty, the tripartite administrative division of powers, the highly specialized Six Ministries system, the multi-phase decision-making system for overarching policies, the censorate system implementing internalized synchronous criticism and checks, and the imperial examination system for nationwide open recruitment of officials. and the imperial examination system for nationwide open recruitment of officials. These uniquely ancient Chinese mechanisms—featuring checks and balances, political participation, and administrative rationality—contain timeless elements. If wisely integrated into contemporary constitutional democratic frameworks, they could potentially undergo a chemical reaction with certain truthful elements from Western institutional civilizations.

China's future constitutional democracy cannot simply replicate any existing model from another nation. It must systematically integrate the essence of political systems from throughout history and across the globe with a spirit of transcendent freedom and an open-minded embrace. Based on practical needs, it must boldly pursue comprehensive innovation or indigenous creation, continuously refining its constitutional framework according to experimental outcomes—an approach more aligned with the Chinese nation's pragmatic and empiricist philosophical principles. If the Chinese nation can successfully establish the world's largest market economy and a first-class modern industrial system within three to four decades, it can undoubtedly establish a world-class, diverse, and balanced constitutional democracy within the same timeframe.

II. Freedom Under the Rule of Law. Freedom is inherent to human nature; individual liberty is a natural right. The very foundation of personal meaning lies in maximizing the pursuit of autonomous freedom and noble liberty. All social communities exist solely to protect and advance individual freedom. As a political system, democracy serves as the means to realize the ideal of freedom. Constitutional democracy represents humanity's optimal political arrangement—forged through centuries of accumulated experience—designed to safeguard and promote the individual freedoms of all citizens within a nation.

An ideal political system must possess the capacity to tangibly produce "great liberty"—that is, to help maximize the autonomous and noble freedom of all individuals. Throughout human history, societies embodying great liberty have existed in tangible, living form. Classic examples in human history include the "non-interventionist governance" of Emperor Wen of Han in ancient China, the "Zhenguan Era of Good Governance" under Emperor Taizong of Tang, the "Kaiyuan Era of Good Governance" under Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, the two centuries following the Golden Age of the Athenian polis in ancient Greece, and the period spanning over 150 years since the conclusion of the American Civil War. Most existing constitutional democratic systems have yet to reach the ideal stage. For instance, the United States, standing at the forefront of humanity's quest for freedom, has largely realized the autonomy of its citizens, yet the actualization of their noble freedom and spiritual orientation remains significantly inadequate. Nevertheless, a pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy inherently possesses powerful momentum and immense potential to evolve toward an ideal system. As a philosophical nation, the Chinese people should proactively respond to this once-in-a-millennium political transformation and, while creating their own new classical civilization, establish the highest political ideal benchmark for themselves. They must effectively activate its powerful momentum and fully develop its immense potential. We must dare to embrace truth, dare to follow the path ordained by heaven, and dare to transform political ideals into political reality on Chinese soil. Human beings should respect themselves and believe they are worthy of lofty ideals and noble lives. What ancient China under the Han and Tang dynasties, ancient Athens, and modern America achieved, contemporary China has both the

capability and the right to accomplish.

Two thousand two hundred years ago, Emperor Wen of Han pursued a political path of "empowering the people to govern themselves to achieve universal harmony." In that era, citizens enjoyed freedoms unimaginable to modern people—they could trade freely, travel freely, teach freely, form associations freely, carry weapons in public, and enjoy 12 tax-free years. Individuals even possessed the liberty to mine minerals and mint coins. In today's digital age, technological advancements permit citizens to create secondary currencies within self-operated public platforms without conflicting with national legal tender. Naturally, allowing direct exchange between different platforms' secondary currencies requires utmost prudence. In the coming oceanic and space eras, if legislation permits, allowing citizens to freely mine the seabed or outer space with legal protection would undoubtedly boost their mother country's economic vitality and aggregate wealth. Modern Western legal systems have significantly reduced liability for individual entrepreneurial or investment failures through corporate law (limited liability), substantially enhanced personal financing capabilities for large-scale investment, production, or exploration via securities laws, and granted exclusive profit rights to inventors of advanced technologies through patent law—thus greatly stimulating widespread individual innovation across society. Under such a system of "proactive law" that actively creates institutions, citizens' foundational economic freedoms—their initial liberty rights, procedural freedom capabilities, and outcome-based autonomous energies—have been substantially expanded in the sense of "substantive freedom."

For China to establish a constitutional democratic system advancing toward a society of great freedom in the future, it must fully learn from and draw upon the experience and wisdom of such "proactive legal governance."Under such "proactive legal governance," not only would Chinese citizens' rights to life, personal safety, dignity, reputation, property, freedom of movement, religious freedom, and political liberty receive effective protection from an independent judicial system, but the state and societal legislative frameworks could also substantially expand citizens' rights through proactive legislation and trial-and-error incremental approaches. These include the right to establish independent media outlets,

public platforms, social organizations, and schools; the right to establish venture enterprises, the right to create alternative currencies, and the right for private individuals to mine resources in the deep sea or outer space. These rights would be accompanied by strict legal boundaries, regulatory oversight, and enforcement mechanisms. Through this legal empowerment and expansion of rights, individuals themselves become a force, universally rising as social energy entities. This provides a solid foundation of resources and capabilities for them to fully assert their sovereignty and rights in political, social, and cultural spheres; fully develop their personalities and talents; fully engage in personal exploration, scientific and artistic originality; and thereby continually shape and elevate their noble souls through profound humanistic sentiments, transcendent experiences, and the cultivation of literature, music, and ritual. The great freedom of Chinese citizens under a constitutional democratic system will become a tangible possibility precisely because individuals possess unprecedented liberties, capacities for autonomy, and self-directed energy.

An ideal system can become a tangible reality on earth through pragmatic and creative legal operations—this is one of the essences of modern civilization's "active rule of law." We also hope to witness that, in the process of embracing and fully learning from Western legal practices and wisdom to build China's future society of great freedom, the Chinese nation may evolve from a "philosophical nation" into an "active rule-of-law nation."

III. Democracy under the Rule of Law. The value concept of democracy refers to a nation's populace possessing the highest political power and political sovereignty. The core of democratic practice lies in the people exercising, through universal suffrage under the rule of law, the power to appoint representatives to their national parliament or the nation's highest executive leader. Furthermore, some modern democracies often submit major state affairs, significant legislation, or constitutional amendments to national referendums—a form of democratic practice where the people directly exercise partial decision-making authority over supreme matters and legislative power.

In modern indirect democracy, there are numerous instances where elected representatives or administrative leaders gradually become detached from their constituents. In light of this, China's future constitutional

democracy must establish democratic oversight of representatives and administrative leaders at all levels through political procedures grounded in the rule of law. Such oversight, along with significant legislative matters, can be partially conducted through scientifically sampled surveys or online voting methods that are operationally convenient and relatively low-cost.

Guided by fundamental principles and technical methodologies, and integrating China's traditional political wisdom, this generation of Chinese people can boldly experiment with new democratic operational models that embody Chinese characteristics and aspirations:

1. Incorporate elements of the imperial examination system into presidential elections and elections for administrative leaders at all levels. As a vast nation, China requires strong executive leadership, making a presidential system appropriate. An election law could be enacted to establish a neutral electoral commission to oversee elections, with judicial remedies provided by a constitutional or electoral court. Presidential candidates would face preliminary screening requirements beyond securing over 100,000 signatures of support. This could include passing standardized examinations on subjects such as political ideology, military and foreign affairs, macroeconomic management, talent development and administration, traditional cultural revival, human rights protection and welfare state, and science, technology, and education. During the decisive phase of the presidential election, advanced written and oral examinations on the aforementioned subjects could be conducted. Three independent expert panels would evaluate the responses, with both the answers and the differing scores made public for all voters to reference when casting their ballots. This open examination process could run concurrently with televised debates.

Similar public examinations for provincial governors, mayors, and county magistrates could be modeled after this system, with subject matter adjusted as needed.

To counterbalance the drawbacks of excessive presidential centralization, China may consider legislating a "dual presidency" system in future experiments. Such dual-leader systems existed in ancient Athens, Sparta, and the late Roman Republic/Empire with commendable records. Prudently, this could first be piloted in a major province, with its future

determined by outcomes, national public opinion, and referendum vote ratios.

2. Regarding democratic oversight, legislation could mandate that the president deliver a public accountability report to the legislature and broadcast nationwide via television networks every three months. This report would be subject to public questioning and criticism from legislators and representatives selected through scientific sampling. Should the president's legally mandated approval rating fall below 25% or a predetermined threshold within 12 months of taking office, Parliament or the public representatives shall issue a formal administrative warning. If the rating drops by 20% within the next 6 months, formal impeachment proceedings shall commence. If approval ratings remain between 20% and 25% for eighteen consecutive months, Parliament shall enact special legislation to strip the President of administrative authority in areas where he or she is widely recognized as lacking competence, and to transfer such powers to a designated Prime Minister or Deputy Prime Minister.

According to scientific statistics, for any city or nation, sampling surveys of 1,200 or more individuals on a given topic yield a margin of error consistently below 3%. Accordingly, impeachment voting rights for the president may be granted to an impeachment committee comprising 12,001 members. This committee may be formed from scientifically sampled representatives across provinces, including: 4,001 civilian delegates aged between 45 and 75; 1,000 secondary school principals; 1,000 college and vocational school presidents; 1,000 provincial, municipal, and county principal and deputy officials;1,000 provincial, municipal, and county council members; 2,000 manufacturing general managers and management experts; and 2,000 elite representatives from various sectors. The latter six groups may have no specific age restrictions. If removal votes exceed 67%, the impeachment takes immediate effect. A concurrent vote may also decide whether to initiate criminal investigations into the president for offenses such as dereliction of duty. If votes exceed 80%, the case is immediately referred to the Constitutional Court for trial.

New presidential candidates may only be selected from among the Prime Minister, Vice Prime Ministers, and full ministers of each department. The campaign period lasts twenty days. A new electoral college comprising

12,011 members, selected according to the aforementioned scientifically sampled proportional representation, elects the new president through two rounds of voting over one day.

The counting of votes in the presidential election is conducted and supervised on-site by all faculty and students of national universities and colleges. All election and impeachment votes are subject to free recounts.

The democratic election and oversight of national legislators, provincial/municipal/county administrative heads, and legislators—particularly impeachment and recall procedures—may follow this model.

3. Scientific sampling surveys may also be widely applied in major legislative matters. Bills proposed by citizen groups exercising their active initiative rights may enter parliamentary legislative procedures if they receive support from over 50% of 12,011 randomly selected representatives twice within six consecutive months. Amendments to legislative provisions may follow this model. However, national referendums on major state affairs, the Constitution, and constitutional amendments must be decided by all voters through physical paper ballots.

IV. Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances Under the Rule of Law. The "separation of powers" is generally understood as the division of authority among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, carried out through legal procedures. In practice, however, these three branches handle numerous major affairs beyond the legal process. For instance, while the legislature's primary function is lawmaking, it also represents the public in criticizing and overseeing the government. Its authority over fiscal appropriations primarily pertains to specific administrative matters, though Western parliamentary traditions have legalized the fiscal process. Furthermore, the Senate's authority to approve cabinet minister appointments does not fall within the standard definition of legislative power.

The future constitutional democratic system design in China must resolutely reject theoretical dogmatism and appropriately combine and configure substantive separation-of-powers mechanisms proven effective in both Chinese and Western contexts. In the initial phase, we can primarily draw upon the tripartite separation of powers framework—often hailed as a model of political design—while resolutely employing pragmatic

approaches to address several major shortcomings exposed in its actual operation:

1. Legislators in mature tripartite systems currently exhibit notable deficiencies in legislative expertise. Future Chinese legislators could each be assigned three lawyers, two management experts, one media specialist, one stenographer, and two constituent service specialists (with legislators themselves able to recruit additional volunteers). This would empower them to become "super-legislators" with enhanced capabilities and team synergy. Such arrangements would meet the demands of the information age for representatives' daily work and enable timely responses to constituents' directives and needs.

2. One-quarter of Senate members may be appointed by provincial senates from outstanding cabinet ministers completing their terms, with excellence determined by annual performance scores and sustained public opinion polls. This would substantially enhance the Senate's value in terms of administrative experience and strategic vision.

3. Drawing inspiration from ancient China's censor system, an independent Criticism Department should be established within the central government. Its primary division would conduct 24/7 close-range oversight of the President, publicly releasing weekly records of presidential violations and biweekly high-level strategic/management critiques from oversight officers. Similar oversight protocols would apply to officials from the Prime Minister down to deputy ministers.

4. Beyond the House of Representatives and Senate, an independent Consultative Council could be established. Drawing on certain practices of today's Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, its members would be selected from elite professionals across industries and ethnic groups. The council would focus on core issues such as strategic course correction, multi-ethnic equity, and industry advocacy, proposing governance recommendations enforced through oversight by the government's Criticism Department, the legislature, and public opinion polls. The Consultative Council may also possess partial legislative initiative authority. Its proposals, if approved by a majority in the House of Representatives' specialized committees, may proceed to legislation.

5. The Supreme Court's nine justices adjudicate major final appeals

based on natural law, publicly disclosing their reasoning. A two-thirds majority vote may submit veto recommendations against presidential decrees and bills passed by both chambers to 12,011 scientifically sampled public representatives. Their final determination rests on a two-thirds majority vote. Justices generally retire at age 75. Those maintaining approval ratings consistently above 80% through scientific sampling may serve until age 90. Democratic oversight of the judiciary may be jointly advanced by the House of Representatives, the Senate, the Consultative Council, and the Criticism Department.

V. Pluralistic Political Competition Under the Rule of Law. To enable hundreds of millions of citizens to fully exercise their freedom to form political parties and social organizations, China appears to require a transitional phase of multiparty democracy. America's two-party system is simple and clear, having fostered unity within parties. However, the protection afforded by parties has increasingly rendered parliamentary checks on the presidency unworkable. Should the ruling party become a minority in parliament, the president's key policy proposals face significant obstacles to passage, artificially leading to inefficient governance. Yet multiparty systems carry significant drawbacks. Certain parties may exploit their pivotal role in close votes—where a single shift in support can sway outcomes—to coerce the ruling party into political deals for key government appointments. This severely curtails the president's freedom to appoint based on merit and maximize administrative efficiency. In designing China's future constitutional democracy, the parliamentary deliberation and voting process for the president's major policy proposals could be subject to time limits. Furthermore, the president could be granted the authority to submit major proposals rejected by a two-thirds parliamentary majority to a final vote by 12,011 public representatives selected through scientific sampling(still requiring a two-thirds majority for passage). This would powerfully constrain the obstruction and disruption of presidential governance efficiency caused by partisan bargaining within parliament that conflicts with the public good. This "statistical democracy"—where 12,011 representatives deliver the final verdict—functions as a statistical mechanism for popular sovereignty. It is likely to forge a novel party landscape in China's future, distinct from conventional two-party or multi-

party systems. Consequently, China's future political parties may gradually evolve into competitive ideological alliances representing the entire populace, rather than interest-based coalitions of political figures. Many parties would thus place greater emphasis on deepening local autonomy in regions where they hold dominance—precisely the aspects we most anticipate.

VI. Federalism Under the Rule of Law. Federalism represents the constitutional democratic version of local autonomy, implementing vertical decentralization between central and local authorities. This vertical division of power better enables public participation in managing nearby affairs and facilitates efficient governance of local matters.

The feudal system implemented during China's Western Zhou Dynasty greatly accelerated the Chinese nation's development of the vast, untamed lands across the country. Together with the autonomous governance of the feudal states and the freedom of ancient tribes, it nurtured and catalyzed the peak of original civilizational creativity among the Hundred Schools of Thought. China's centralized commandery-county system from the Qin and Han dynasties through the Tang and Song periods featured administrative units at the prefectural and commandery levels, often numbering 100 or more, arranged in a flat hierarchy. This horizontal layout effectively mitigated the excessive concentration of power inherent in centralized governance. In Western history, the competitive pluralism of ancient Greek city-states greatly advanced the expansion of popular rights and the flourishing of civilization. The federal system practiced in modern America has earned worldwide acclaim for its vibrant local autonomy, the layered balance achieved by segmenting vertical power, and the fair and streamlined judicial remedies for conflicts between the federal government and states. In contrast, Goethe once pondered: "What would become of the great France if it had not one center (Paris) but ten centers?"I imagine that France, whose artistic imagination surpasses the world in freedom, would radiate three times its current energy and vitality! Today, China's provinces widely suffer from provincial capitals failing to effectively drive economic and cultural development in peripheral cities, localities lacking efficient and full autonomy, and stark regional wealth disparities. Federalism offers the ultimate institutional solution to these structural flaws. Looking ahead, for

China to proactively advance toward widespread manufacturing prosperity, embrace the era of ocean and space exploration, and pioneer a wholly original classical civilization, it must invigorate the dynamic competition among its diverse regions. The yearning of China's billions for a society of greater freedom and more substantive participation in local governance makes federalism an imperative.

The future constitutional democratic system design for China could build on the current 31 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions by further dividing the nation into 76 to 80 democratically autonomous provinces. Through strategic planning—such as concentrating resource-rich areas—this approach would create seventy-six to eighty economic hubs and centers of civilization and culture. Democracy cannot be satisfied with mere electoral authorization; it must produce a society of "great freedom" and a lifestyle of "great freedom," while simultaneously generating higher administrative efficiency. Within the democratic political framework of a federal system, the political line of "prioritizing economic growth" must be upheld in the long term. The House of Representatives, Senate, and Consultative Council may preside over or lead the formulation of a continuously improvable national long-term economic planning bill, which must be supplemented by corresponding resource allocations and special authorizations. At a minimum, two-thirds of provinces must establish conventional manufacturing and information-based manufacturing as their economic foundation. The legislation may also proactively plan for small economic zones of 4 to 8 million inhabitants, creating 20 German models, 20 Swiss models, and 20 Japan/Korea models across mainland China. By extending industrial chains across large-scale technology, high-tech, and heavy manufacturing, the vast majority of highly autonomous provinces can achieve self-reliant, robust economic and fiscal security. With this foundation, within a decade, undergraduate and specialized education at universities or colleges focusing on applied technology, science and technology, and business management could be made tuition-free. This would also serve as an effective positive welfare measure to promote "equal opportunity" throughout society.

In terms of civilization and culture, 76 to 80 provincial capitals may select one or more of the five major world cultural capitals—modern Paris,

Vienna, New York, ancient Athens, and Tang Dynasty Chang'an—as direct models for emulation and integrated innovation. This will recreate a three-dimensional, comprehensive center of civilization and culture for the information and space ages. Each province may enact specialized legislation to establish multiple independent institutions—such as philosophy, poetry, art, and opera/theater academies—and opera/theater houses through flexible property rights frameworks. These institutions would attract top-tier talents in the humanities, philosophy, arts, and culture from across the nation or globally, producing abundant exploratory and innovative works while broadly enhancing public humanities and arts literacy. To elevate the quality, volume of information, and balance between citizens' freedom of speech and thought across provinces, the National Assembly and provincial assemblies may enact special legislation to initially cultivate three to eight newspaper conglomerates and news television networks in each province. This fosters intellectual and commercial competition among them, while strictly prohibiting any conglomerate from owning newspapers or television stations across multiple provinces. This prevents oligopolistic monopolies that could disrupt the national equilibrium of the market for ideas, speech, and information. Federalism is the essential path to building a society of great freedom. Yet such a society must rely on the radiating influence of dozens of internally established, visionary cultural centers—nurturing generations of citizens with refined and noble spiritual and cultural qualities.

VII. An Efficient Administrative System Under the Rule of Law. The vibrant dynamism of China's Han and Tang dynasties stemmed in part from a bureaucracy largely composed of capable grassroots officials, merchants, and military officers, all endowed with strong practical operational skills. Prefectural and county chiefs were granted extensive authority over affairs, finances, and personnel appointments, earning the era its reputation for "bureaucratic governance." The Song and Ming dynasties almost exclusively selected officials through the imperial examination system. While this achieved open and fair access to political participation, it also created drawbacks, including narrow entry points into officialdom and generally weak public management capabilities among administrative leaders. Moreover, the Ministry of Personnel's growing dominance effectively stripped local chief officials of their power to "form cabinets" and appoint

capable individuals. The political class's ability to identify and utilize talent also gradually declined due to prolonged inactivity in this area. Today's Chinese bureaucracy is repeating the flaws of the Song and Ming eras, leaving China's mainstream management elites largely outside the system.

A federal system under constitutional democracy would grant elected county magistrates, mayors, and governors the authority and experience to form cabinets and appoint capable officials. It could also integrate rich management and talent selection wisdom from ancient and modern times, both domestic and international, continuously improving to significantly enhance administrative efficiency:

1. The central government could draw inspiration from ancient multi-premier systems by implementing a tripartite premier system. Three premiers would respectively oversee the industrial, livelihood, and foreign affairs/science and technology sectors. No matter how capable the current single premier may be, they cannot comprehensively manage the vast and complex affairs of state, and their lack of expertise in multiple domains is increasingly evident.

2. When forming cabinets and appointing officials, popularly elected administrative leaders should widely recruit outstanding entrepreneurs and professional managers. The latter can not only help effectively enhance the efficiency of administrative management services within their respective departments but also inject the "living water" of industrial, commercial, and social needs and information into the administrative system, which is notoriously rigid.

3. Implement comprehensive precision management across administrative departments, provide lifelong free management training for all civil servants with a blend of theory and practice, and establish standards for civil servant rewards, punishments, promotions, and dismissals based on two dimensions: public opinion survey results and internal evaluations—reflecting the prevailing trend of the information age. The House of Representatives, Senate, and Consultative Council may direct the Government Criticism Department, Supervision Department, and Personnel Department to develop operational manuals, division-of-labor manuals, emergency response manuals, and reward/punishment promotion manuals for each civil servant position. Implementation shall be ensured through

routine criticism and supervision, inspections, and sampling surveys to achieve sound governance under a democratic system.

All the above improvements should be subject to parliamentary legislation and its continuous progressive amendments.

VIII. The System for Realizing Human Rights under the Rule of Law and the Active Welfare State System under the Rule of Law. Human rights bear witness to the inherent moral dignity of every individual. Safeguarding and promoting human rights constitutes one of the core objectives of constitutional democracy. In a country like China, where human rights have long been severely compromised, transforming human rights ideals into an ever-strengthening reality demands proactive, systematic, and institutionalized action. The welfare state—a humanitarian system invented by modern Western democracies to ensure that all citizens share equally in basic safeguards and development opportunities—should and will become an essential component of China's future political civilization. Given that the Chinese people have historically suffered from the scourge of absolute egalitarianism, vigilance against the potential laziness and dependency fostered by excessive welfare has become a national consensus. Therefore, China's welfare state must be an active one that, while safeguarding basic human dignity and a decent quality of life, primarily incentivizes individual self-reliance and self-improvement.

1. In the future constitutional democracy of China, independent human rights departments may be established within governments at all levels. These departments would be responsible for safeguarding and promoting human rights comprehensively, routinely, and systematically, through administrative resources, procedures, and judicial litigation. Human rights commissioners would focus on touring areas and institutions prone to human rights issues, such as nursing homes and prisons, dynamically addressing conflicts and eliminating potential violations.

2. Utilizing numerous management schools as platforms, China should undertake large-scale, forward-looking training of female officials and professional managers. Legislation should mandate a minimum level of female representation among chief administrative officers, deputy ministers, and leaders of public welfare organizations. Proactively creating diverse opportunities for women to showcase their individuality, strengths, and

exceptional talents is essential. The exemplary leadership of outstanding women and their talents will inspire a generation of female citizens with a sense of civic pride and a proactive spirit.

3. Implement full tuition waivers for undergraduate, master's, and doctoral education for ethnic minorities such as Mongols, Tibetans, Hui, and Uyghurs. Provide enhanced resource-weighted protection for their cultural heritage. Demonstrate profound respect for religious freedom through coordinated legislative, judicial, and social advocacy efforts. Allocate substantial resources to empower reformist factions within Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, enabling them to become the dominant mainstream in China's pluralistic, coexisting free religious landscape.

4. Actively invest state capital while encouraging charitable funds to establish public-benefit or state-owned pharmaceutical enterprises. Eliminate inhumane profiteering in essential medicines critical to public health and longevity. Primarily employ market-based approaches and debt restructuring techniques, supplemented by necessary fiscal subsidies, to achieve universal free healthcare. The primary benchmarks for evaluation shall be significant increases in average national lifespan and robust growth in leisure and happiness indices. Within twenty years, implement fully free undergraduate education nationwide.

5. Drawing on German and Danish models, provide fully subsidized retraining for all unemployed individuals to facilitate active re-employment. Enact legislation granting low taxes, tax exemptions, or diverse resource support to elderly care enterprises promoting proactive wellness, refined leisure, and harmonious coexistence. This will foster a societal culture of high-standard spiritual and material care for the elderly.

IX. Social Pluralism and Autonomy Under the Rule of Law. Implementing social pluralism and autonomy primarily fosters widespread public enthusiasm and capacity for participation. China's constitutional democracy, advancing toward greater liberty, should strive not only for the great freedom of individual citizens' autonomous lives but also for the great freedom of citizens' collective lives through association. In such a society, citizens enjoy the right to freely form alliances or contractually participate in various public associations. The Association Law enacted by the assembly should strictly prohibit the establishment of highly centralized structures

within any public association. Unhealthy associations where members lack self-governance or veto rights, and where mental control or personal dependency exists, should face direct and indirect oversight or pressure from human rights officials until they retreat to the civilized boundaries of group life under the rule of law.

Implementing social pluralistic autonomy will also significantly enhance the effectiveness and vitality of public associations. Why does contemporary China fail to produce scientific masters? Why does China lag so far behind its eastern neighbor, Japan, in the number of Nobel Prize winners? The reality is far more dire than reflected in the "Qian Xuesen Question."The pervasive lack of originality among Chinese people in high-tech fields beyond aerospace, in basic research, and in school education has become a profound national disgrace. This disgrace stems entirely from the long-standing, severe suppression of thought, culture, and education by the totalitarian authoritarian system. A future constitutionally democratic China must thoroughly wash away this disgrace by liberating the individuality and potential of its citizens through extensive freedom in thought and culture. At the legislative and administrative levels, implementing a national project to nurture individual originality—prioritizing its cultivation in K-12 students and advancing university autonomy—is paramount. The core of university autonomy lies in "de-bureaucratization." Taking American universities—the global model of academic self-governance—as a reference point, we must fully implement a "leadership by experts" system in which professors' committees govern institutions. Within a decade, constructing 100 to 300 world-class scientific laboratories and inviting hundreds of Nobel Prize-level global scientific masters to teach and mentor at Chinese universities could be a wise shortcut. This would provide hands-on guidance for Chinese students and scientists to reach the frontiers of exploring the mysteries of the universe.

Implementing diverse social autonomy requires special legislative planning and resource allocation. By leveraging administrative resources and primarily guiding social resources, we should cultivate vibrant, free-flowing community and academic life in philosophy, poetry, art, and culture. This will enable Chinese people to achieve world-class advancement and leapfrog development in these fields, leading to widespread comprehensive

innovation and even original breakthroughs. In these humanities domains, the Chinese nation particularly needs to champion humanitarian truths, moral philosophy, and aesthetic ideals of character through lofty and transcendent guidance, thereby nurturing citizens' universal sense of ownership and noble spirit. Our great freedom refers not only to the full realization of individual autonomy but also to the continuous elevation and transcendence of noble personal liberty. Crucially, we must leverage unprecedented individual autonomy to achieve unprecedented noble personal freedom. All this shall be attested by social customs born of profoundly humane civilization—both in process and outcome—and expressed through the continuous emergence of brilliantly original spiritual and cultural creations.

Part V: My Conceptual Revolution in the Philosophy of Life Value

Our fundamental political principles have been outlined above, and our ideal blueprint and exploratory concepts have been preliminarily shared with the world. Yet these remain merely macro-level frameworks. Higher, deeper truths—the primordial cosmic truths of humanization and individual philosophical truths—await us ahead. Even if these institutional mechanisms and general grassroots self-governance were operationalized, they could not shape the spiritual life of an increasingly diverse and flat society. The exceptional quality of spiritual life can only grow organically from its authentic, natural essence. The new spaces, energies, lifestyles, and explorations of life's limits born from millennia of transformation call for a new philosophy of life values to guide humanity's ascent.

Philosophy holds a supreme status within the cultural traditions of the Chinese nation. Yet traditional philosophy, overly simplistic, sings old tunes that fail to reach new heights of life. Ancient communal philosophies overemphasized collectivism and authority, stifling individual growth; twentieth-century totalitarian cultures fostered a widespread decline in character through oppressive confinement and brainwashing, breeding passive conformity and a lack of self-awareness. Liberalist thought introduced to mainland China in the mid-to-late 1990s helped legitimize the moral validity of emerging individualistic lifestyles in the market-economy era. Yet it suffers from inherent limitations. Its reach extends only to the doctrine of "individual freedom first," failing to propose a fundamental

individualist philosophy of life. Moreover, it carries the civilizational lethargy of post-World War I Britain and continental Europe, advocating retreat into private spheres while evading the rights of free association and public communal life. Advocates of liberalism in mainland China often reduce liberty to passively adhering to moral and legal norms that refrain from harming others, overlooking that freedom is inherently a freedom of action. "Do no harm" merely marks the boundary of action; the essence of liberty lies in the right to autonomous action and the reality of exercising that autonomy. The goal of freedom is to create an exceptional and noble life through self-directed action.

Life has already outpaced philosophy; philosophy must catch up with life, immerse itself in life, gather energy within life, achieve breakthroughs and explosions, and then use philosophy to guide and shape life. The Chinese nation, brimming with a vibrant, ascendant spirit amidst millennia of profound transformation, needs not only to learn and internalize the mature, conservative liberalism of twentieth-century Europe and America, but also to learn and internalize the idealistic, ascendant liberalism of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and America. Moreover, as a philosophical nation, the Chinese people harbor an intrinsic need: to synthesize the universal humanistic civilization, liberal democracy, and individualistic values of the global era. Within this synthesis, a chemical reaction must occur to forge a fundamental, ascendant, and vital philosophy of human value. We require a revolution in the philosophy of human value, and we are fortunate to possess the multidimensional resources and historical opportunity to initiate it.

The fundamental objectives of this revolution in the philosophy of life's value include: establishing a philosophy capable of providing a principled proof for the absolute value of the individual; creating a philosophy of intrinsic, natural self-awareness that propels individuals to expand their capabilities and authority, fueling passionate life exploration; and founding a philosophy that relentlessly pursues the ultimate existence of finding one's place in the world while achieving noble transcendence. The essence of philosophical thinking lies in conceptual reasoning. The pivotal point of this philosophical revolution hinges on our ability to introduce novel concepts capable of triggering chemical reactions among the fundamental elements of

human civilization.

These new concepts, capable of serving as the pivotal points of a philosophical revolution, have already emerged. However, we must resolutely and boldly elevate them to their rightful positions as philosophical origins, cores, or pinnacles through conjecture and refutation, argumentation and critique, before proceeding with ideal philosophical deduction.

These concepts include:

1. Value Existence.

Life is a value-bearing existence. From the moment an individual emerges from the womb, parents cherish them, society values them, and civilization esteems them—thus they are inherently significant. Being loved, nurtured, and valued constitutes the first fundamental reality of human existence. Returning affection to those who love, nurture, and value us represents the first positive act of human life. Because of this innate capacity for emotional reciprocity and practical action, the infant is inherently noble. Rationality is not the primary reason for this innate nobility; rather, it is the cyclical interaction of being loved and returning love. Rationality, compassion, and empathy are merely components within this cycle. Compassion is neither the first principle of life nor the first principle of society, for it is too self-centered and too weak in its regard for others. Self-preservation is not either. When an infant responds to those who kiss, hold, and play with them through affectionate embraces and laughter, what calculations of self-preservation could occupy their mind! The first principle of life and society must be, and inevitably is, the reciprocal cycle of being loved and returning affection—the primal interaction of love and affection, the capacity and reality of mutual love.

Life exists in spiritual form; the stream of positive emotional consciousness is life's essence and matrix, the very substance of existence itself. Initially, our stream of positive emotional consciousness was confined to interactions of varying degrees of love with parents, siblings, relatives, friends, and mentors. Human civilization, guided by the "invisible hand" of the "value hierarchy," expanded our capacity to "love those around us" and our positive emotions into love for strangers, noble love, and love for all humanity. This "invisible hand" of civilization not only guides us to continually ascend life's peaks but also ruthlessly thrusts us into fierce and

unpredictable value competition. Survival competition is harsh enough for us, yet value competition is often even more brutal—if we misdefine values, or foolishly and barbarically oppose or trample upon them, we risk losing not merely material gains, but even our very lives.

So what is value? Value is the spiritual information and energy crystallized within existence. The value of life, simply put, is the spiritual presence within an individual's life that is worthy of love. As a positive, intimate emotion between people, the core of love is heartfelt respect and a willingness to pay the price for cherishing someone.

On the African savannah, breathtaking footage has captured a mother antelope throwing herself into a crocodile's jaws to save her fawn. Even in the primitive, ignorant lives of early humans, mutual esteem and respect existed between mothers and children. This is the innate divinity and nobility of higher animals with advanced emotional capacities; humanity is merely the fully developed aspect of this natural divinity and nobility. The dignity of individual life arises from being valued and respected by others. The inherent nobility of life emerges from the conscious self-respect of the spiritual subject—that is, the individual life form itself, placing great or paramount importance on being respected, especially on its own worthiness of respect. This leads to a fierce defense of life's dignity and a pursuit to establish an inner spiritual existence more worthy of respect. Respecting all people and, above all, oneself is a divine quality inherent in the human individual.

Because we possess the advanced emotional capacity for mutual love and respect, we are inherently worthy of respect and affection. Moreover, through our vigorous and sustained positive actions that are worthy of respect, esteem, affection, and love, we become deserving of respect and affection through our actions. Therefore, the life of each human individual is a value-bearing existence. This is the first truth about life. This fundamental truth has been proven by facts, not merely existing at the level of normative "oughts." Life is a valuable existence—this is a foundational fact of civilized society. As civilization evolves and advances, the intrinsic value of life grows ever greater—this is a historical fact of civilized society. Thus, the proposition that "the life of each human individual possesses absolute value" has been proven at the level of principle. Should there be any objection, it

must be logically refuted or empirically disproved from within philosophy itself.

II. Individual Sovereignty.

The spiritual personhood of the individual possesses absolute value; therefore, life is an irreplaceable and inviolable existence. The concept of "existence" proposed by modern European existentialist philosophy is highly innovative, its novelty lying in emphasizing that existence is the fundamental position of life. However, existentialism commits a fundamental error by equating animalistic existence—freedom—with human existence—freedom—when it elevates "primordial choice" as the center and pivot of existence. The theory of free choice recognizes the brain's informational control activities but fails to acknowledge that humans are social beings and that love and respect have primary priority in human social life. Choice freedom is merely a new variant of medieval free will. Will is merely a physical-psychological factor, and choice is merely a physical fact, but freedom is a moral value. Animal existence is purely physical existence, but human existence is value-based existence. The individual human life within civilized society possesses a natural inclination toward active, conscious existence—to exist more richly, profoundly, and nobly. For the essence of civilization lies in absolute human-centeredness, in absolutely prioritizing the cultivation of humanity and fostering autonomy.

Personal sovereignty is the most explosive philosophical concept in the contemporary world. It articulates and emphasizes the very center and pivot of life's existence—that is, the fundamental basis for individuals in real society to achieve active, conscious existence. Personal sovereignty carries two layers of meaning: the supreme right of the individual over their own body, mind, and life journey; and the supreme right of the individual over the social community in which they reside and participate. Compared to traditional notions of "autonomy," the revolutionary significance of individual sovereignty lies not only in its emphasis on the absolute mastery of one's own life but also in its assertion that the individual is simultaneously the master and sovereign of society. This autonomy is imbued with social rights and resources, demanding that society provide civil guarantees and proactive services. The shared sovereignty of the individual over society resembles the spiritual co-ownership of original shareholders in a joint-stock

system. It attests that individuals within society are, in essence, independent, active, foundational, and creative units within a flat, discrete structure—not passive, dependent, predetermined, or created elements or components within a three-dimensional organic whole. The "sovereign individual" and "supreme right of the individual" referenced by Locke and Mill represent the sources of the concept of individual sovereignty.

Individual sovereignty manifests the absolute mastery and sovereign status of the individual in real social life. It possesses substantive energy, signifying that the individual is not an atomistic entity but the master of social energy—when the sovereign moves, mountains roar and seas surge. Since Millandora, philosophers of life have sought to vigorously assert the individual's right to occupy the cosmic center through free will. Yet without moral and legal self-respecting sovereignty, without tangible social rights and resources, this "cosmic centrality" degenerates into mere self-aggrandizing illusion. Only individual sovereignty—and solely individual sovereignty—makes this cosmic centrality a tangible possibility.

Traditional conceptual philosophies often interpreted the "self" as a highly subjective, proactive "greater self." The theory of individual sovereignty emphasizes that its essence lies in the principle that the Way resides within me, and civilization resides within me. It is a humanistic civilization that elevates each self to a supreme existence, endowing it with superhuman energy; through individual sovereignty, the self becomes an objectively real, superpowered "greater self."Personal sovereignty provides the most powerful support and expression for the "greater self." This sovereign "greater self" stands in stark contrast to the humble self, the dependent and submissive self, and the passive, fatalistic self."Amidst the ordinary, certain pillars of light reach toward the heavens, proving humanity possesses a higher destiny." Because I am the unquestioned master of society, I alone possess the qualification, capability, and mission to take the world upon my shoulders, to bear the entire universe on my own back, and to climb step by step toward the summit of civilization. The notion that "freedom precedes essence" is a mistaken understanding that artificially separates freedom from essence. Personal freedom is one of the core elements of personal essence. When I exercise my sovereign freedom in reality, it is precisely when my essence unfolds in reality. In the arduous

journey of life, where I courageously and fearlessly undertake the mission of human civilization, I create my own essence. Personal sovereignty underpins the self-respect of one's spiritual character. For the self, true self-respect is attained only when I tangibly establish a sense of mastery and tangibly exercise fundamental sovereign freedom. What enables me to stand tall and live fully on this earth, what fuels my passionate dedication to life's endeavors, what fortifies my resilience to meet challenges and dangers with unwavering resolve, and what propels me step by step toward excellence and nobility—whether in utilitarian or moral terms—filling me with confidence, self-respect, and pride, is precisely my personal sovereignty.

III. Ultimate Awakening and Moral Courage.

What is essence? What is the essence of humanity?

Essence is "the existence of existence," the individual cause of being. It is the internal core mechanism that enables a thing's existence to persist. The humanindividual's life is a highly complex system integrating material, energy, information, spatial structures, and temporal processes. Its essence is the internal core mechanism that sustains the individual's physical existence, spiritual existence, and value existence.

Essence, as the individual cause of existence or the internal cause, stands as one of the most beautiful and profound concepts in ancient philosophy and indeed in all philosophical eras. The essence of life unfolds tangibly and accumulates progressively when an individual exercises sovereign freedom in action. The most wondrous and exhilarating aspect of life lies in its capacity for existence to actively generate existence, for life to consciously shape life, and for the self to explore infinite possibilities—igniting boundless life impulses to forge a radiant spiritual world and spiritual values.

The value an individual sets for their life is commonly called the purpose of life. "Freedom illuminates existence with purpose." Only the sun of value can illuminate an ordinary life. Before life can radiate brilliance, you must first possess the sun of value within your heart.

This sun of value—embodied in ideals like the ideal self or ideal civilization—first resides in the realm of the human spirit. To recognize its truth and internalize it as one's own, the individual spirit must undergo a series of awakenings that transcend mediocrity and ignorance.

One such awakening, termed the Great Awakening or Ultimate Awakening, occurs when an individual recognizes the inevitability of death and thereby pursues the highest meaning of life beyond mortality. As a being of value, human life inherently possesses meaning. Yet the pressure of death can be constructively harnessed to propel the individual toward the pursuit of ultimate meaning and the realization of the most extreme ideal existence. The pressure of death places one in profound inner turmoil. Daring to confront this deep inner turmoil awakens a person from numbness and passivity, leading them from the great dream to the great awakening. The pressure of death ignites a comprehensive awakening and striving in life—the greatest rationality born at the very edge of life's greatest absurdity.

Before the infinite expanse of the cosmos, the individual is indeed insignificant, like a speck in the ocean. Yet within the human civilization we inhabit, the passionate interactions with parents, teachers, friends, and fellow humans—along with the spiritual values of self-respect, personal integrity, and individual sovereignty—are absolute. This humanistic truth counterbalances the loneliness and nihilism of nature, elevating us to a conscious awareness of the cosmos. This represents the greatest reversal within human rational thought.

Great unease gives birth to great hope; eternal sorrow conceals eternal opportunity. The question is: Does life possess the capacity to embrace great hope and internalize eternal opportunity? Does it have the power to transform rational reversal into real-life impulse and action, to establish the pursuit of an ideal life and ideal civilization as its highest purpose? To thereby seek escape from mediocrity, transcend mortality, and embark on the grand, passionate quest to shape a noble and sacred life?

The answer to this question transcends the realm of knowledge. Human rational knowledge alone is insufficient to generate the intrinsic drive for life's actions. What can achieve this is a higher spiritual force distinct from reason: the courage of life.

Philosophers like Confucius and Mencius provided the Chinese people with life-guiding grand purposes and ideals: universally practicing benevolence, upholding justice, and steadily ascending toward the pinnacles of character embodied by noble gentlemen, heroes, and sages. However, the advanced spiritual qualities they emphasized—"benevolence, righteousness,

propriety, and wisdom"—strategically displaced "courage." When their philosophical systems became dominant institutional ideologies and mainstream life philosophies during the Song and Ming dynasties, they gave rise to rather severe negative cultural effects. Yet "courage" holds equal importance to "benevolence" in life. Courage is the engine of action. Its essence lies in the inner spiritual force that propels proactive, risk-defying deeds. Its highest state is life-affirming courage—a profound, life-sustaining bravery distinct from reckless bravado or the "fearlessness of the ignorant." It embraces the mission of upholding humanistic civilization and pursuing a noble, sacred existence as life's purpose, advancing its realization with unwavering persistence and fearless resolve. This inherently affirms one's personal sovereignty to uphold heaven's way and one's dignified selfhood worthy of a noble and sacred life.

Thus, the courage of life essentially drives individuals to validate these humanitarian truths through their own life journeys. In this sense, great courage itself constitutes part of the essence of a great person. Once an individual resolutely chooses this path and witnesses their life willingly endure the absurdities of chance combinations in the grand adventure of pursuing an ideal life and civilization—even to transcend and overcome the absurdity of death—this embodies the greatest wisdom of life. In this sense, great courage is also great wisdom.

A river separates knowledge from action. The knower stands on one bank, the doer on the other; crossing this river is exceedingly difficult. Courage serves as the pivotal bridge between knowing and doing. Experience teaches us that the wise often struggle in vain to become courageous, yet the courageous, by opening their hearts to action and diligently learning through reflection and synthesis, readily attain wisdom. Moreover, courage itself greatly aids in liberating wisdom. The unique opportunities for action afforded to the brave stimulate the development of their full potential, nurturing exceptional wisdom. This river between knowledge and action seems to block eighty to ninety percent of the wise on this side. For the brave, however, the choice is often to cross the river first and ask questions later.

The essence of life lies in action; the life of action is the core of existence. Knowledge is a part of action, not the other way around.

Knowledge is confined to the brain's causal activities—it is singular, one-dimensional, and dim. Action, however, encompasses the entire living organism, including the brain, engaged in causal activities on the ground—it is three-dimensional, full, vibrant, ever-changing, and progressively elevating.

For a life defined by "I will," for living with human dignity, the primary duty of a free, sovereign life is proactive action—crossing the river! Crossing the river!! "The tree of life is not the tree of knowledge."

China's current liberal democratic movement has largely passed its early enlightenment phase, with potential supporters likely numbering in the hundreds of millions. Yet within this camp of free thought, widespread deficiencies in life values persist: "fear of crossing the river," "reluctance to shoulder responsibility," and "a lack of life's passion."Due to professional specialization, the intellectual class dedicated to producing and disseminating theoretical culture has historically not excelled in experiential action. Moreover, the deliberate suppression of natural courage within our traditional Confucianism has done little to cultivate the vital courage needed among the inheritors of our national spiritual and cultural legacy. A deeper root cause lies in the brutal massacres and severe suppression of the Chinese nation's vitality by barbaric authoritarian forces over the past four centuries. Particularly under the 20th-century totalitarian regime's systematic high-pressure confinement, indoctrination, and brainwashing, people have developed widespread political phobia, sinking into servility, decadence, numbness, and blind obedience from which they struggle to escape. The soul of our nation has fallen ill. Yet the intellectual class tasked with healing this national soul—including numerous free-thinking individuals—has itself become afflicted with varying degrees of moral atrophy and spiritual impoverishment, requiring its own cure.

The millennial political and civilizational transformation advancing upon us cannot be led or created by the traditional spiritual aristocracy, but only by a generation of free, sovereign citizens themselves. For the most vibrant among them, decades of expanding economic freedom have nurtured an individualistic lifestyle that has given them a vague sense of the nobility of sovereign consciousness and sovereign personality. Yet they have neither been able nor dared to embrace and internalize this noble spiritual existence

with their very lives; a thin veil still separates them from this nobility. What they now need most is not mere theoretical enlightenment, but a universal awakening of personal courage to fight for freedom. Through continuous revolts of conscience and explosions of spiritual character, they must resolutely break through this barrier. This courage to fight for freedom is what we commonly call moral courage. Moral courage represents the most vital and noble aspect of life's courage—it is the inner spiritual force that drives citizens to rise against oppression, defend liberty, and shoulder the overarching mission of human civilization with their very lives. The essence of moral courage is the spiritual reality of the sovereign individual personality. The Chinese philosopher Mencius once referred to it as the "mighty righteous spirit," and what we commonly call the "vital energy of life" actually points to this very thing. In Western humanist language, it is the cosmic essence residing within our physical lives, signifying the divine nature inherent in each person. What this generation of Chinese citizens most urgently needs is to liberate and nurture this core spiritual force representing the pinnacle of humanity. The philosophical revolution of life values that helps achieve this grand and magnificent goal has thus become the strongest call of our times.

At the heart of this revolution lies the revelation and exaltation of the humanistic truth of individual sovereignty. It inspires citizens to resolutely exercise their personal sovereignty, igniting the moral courage to fully and maximally develop the nobler, higher impulses within human nature. All humanistic truths demand, first and foremost, that you stand up for yourself. Standing up in character means taking action. As the first step in life's journey, the individual citizen must prove their moral conscience to themselves and society through proactive, substantive ethical actions—demonstrating that they have "crossed the river" and stand with dignity and sovereignty upon their own land.

The foremost moral action is to speak truth and walk the path of integrity. Truth must be spoken in the public sphere. Speaking the truth is a direct testament to moral conscience and possesses a powerful moral appeal. We must dare to speak the truth, dare to pierce the sensitive points and critical junctures of authoritarian rulers, shatter their tactics of brainwashing the populace, and help more people awaken and rise. With the spirit of a pawn

advancing across the river, we must steadily expand the "space for truth," dismantling the "bewildering array" of illusions the totalitarian system has cast over the people. Even when facing fierce headwinds, we must never retreat lightly. Modern citizens must not settle for merely "not harming others" as their baseline. The true baseline for those fighting for freedom should be to help those who came before us hold the line, never spreading fear. When intellectuals seek to heal the soul of the nation, they must first strive to rid themselves of the harmful tendency to exaggerate dangers, amplify fears, and gradually shrink their own courage—a tendency that only confuses and paralyzes the vibrant masses.

We must dare to uphold and propagate independent thinking and a spirit of critical inquiry throughout the public sphere. Publicly championing critical thinking constitutes an act of civic virtue, signifying a higher form of "literary integrity." As qualified citizens exercising sovereign freedom, we must not only "awaken" but also "rise"; we must stand tall not only in character but also in thought. We must dare to shatter hypocrisy and the aura of self-restraint, daring to apply critical thinking first and foremost within the ranks of the freedom camp. We must dare to critically examine and thoroughly scrutinize any ancient sage or contemporary authority before offering affirmation; we must dare to expose any theoretical dogmatism traps and the shenanigans of popular brainwashers. Maintaining an appropriate balance of criticism and praise toward everyone, including ourselves, and implementing checks through diverse discourse and pluralistic structures to suppress or shatter any authoritarian tendencies within anyone's mind—including our own—should become fundamental internal public norms. We must dare to promote the gathering of upright individuals, righteous spirit, and sound resources, daring to marginalize schemers who consistently adhere to the principle that "the ends justify the means," forcing them to change themselves. We must dare to uphold the red line of free association, never accepting any form of multidimensional authoritarianism openly or covertly taking root and spreading within civil society.

We must dare to dedicate our lives to noble causes, dare to overcome any obstacles, dare to launch relentless assaults, and dare to transform the grand constitutional democracy and the ideal society of great liberty into an eternal reality across the Chinese land. We must dare to forge our own noble

and sacred existence through great endeavors and great risks, dare to ascend to peak experiences and extreme celebrations, and dare to touch the edge of the universe. Every free and sovereign citizen is an entrepreneur of life. Dare to become the protagonist of history—relying on oneself, not heroes; on self-governance, not proxies; on self-strengthening, not opportunism. Cherish, nurture, and accumulate your own and your comrades' most precious inner moral courage as carefully as you protect your own eyes. Dare to defend your unique individuality and public stance. Be the sovereign, the torchbearer, the momentum-builder, the voice, the critic, the check, the sharer, and the virtuous one in political transformation. Political transformation ultimately decides on the ballot, triumphs at the grassroots, and hinges on the hearts of the people. When the personal sovereignty and political sovereignty of billions of citizens rise like towering peaks, that will be the world-historical moment we ourselves have created. Dare to shape momentum based on your actual circumstances. Dare to conquer all hardships and obstacles through a series of progressive, arduous, and fierce battles, becoming entrepreneurs, pragmatists, and powerhouses in your local communities and fields. This world forever revolves around sovereignty, virtue, and originality. Every authentic individual who bears witness to their sovereignty, virtue, and originality through the core details of their life's actions is the true center of the universe. Each person writes their own history; every sovereign citizen must proactively write their personal history and the grand narrative of history through their sovereign actions. Possessing such noble character and formidable spiritual strength, they deserve to enjoy a life radiant with brilliance.

IV. The Aesthetics of Life.

Life is action, and the life of action manifests as a vibrant, bold, and forward-striving torrent of vitality. The primary elements constituting this life impulse—passion, ambition, competitive spirit—are not opposed to reason. In fact, behind a life radiating passion often lies the deep foresight of reason. When an individual launches an unceasing assault toward life's fundamental purpose, they have invested their most precious resources along the correct path of existence—this constitutes the foremost wisdom of a life of action. Moreover, their life's actions are not idle but "productive": yielding material and technological achievements, spiritual and cultural products,

cultivating noble and exceptional human qualities, and forging a rich and stirring personal journey. They do not rely on hollow free will, but rather affirm the heights attained by their inner spiritual strength through the sovereign's life-adventures and their outcomes. This can only be called a profound experiential rationality.

The pursuit of success and happiness is human nature, yet the greatest flaw in the pride of success and the joy of happiness lies in their lack of depth and nobility. Life aspires to create and possess a more radiant existence. Emphasizing the experience of the process is a key feature of modern human value philosophy. The life endeavor of acting for a great purpose inherently possesses great difficulty. The life adventure of challenging high-difficulty, grand goals is filled with dynamism, change, and chance, and thus brims with the beauty of movement, change, and serendipity. The sensitivity and originality of life's emotions enhance our experience of these inherent aesthetic values. Experiencing the beauty of life's process and states is, in essence, an inner act of singing to life, singing to existence. Singing is a secondary reflective activity, yet it permeates primary productive activities, enriching their vitality. Moreover, it further shapes life through elevated aesthetics and philosophy.

The core of singing life lies in celebrating the rich, radiant beauty of humanity and the solemn, sublime beauty of character that emerge and erupt when life grapples with hardship, risk, and peril. Zhuge Liang sang life through his "Memorial on the Expedition," and Wen Tianxiang sang life through his "Ode to Righteousness." In truth, their singing shaped their own lives into something higher and nobler. How can one establish sacred virtue without leaving words behind? If you do not sing your heart's truth, who will know what you pursue? Who will discern whether you chase reckless courage, blind loyalty, or nobler spiritual values? The essence of singing life is to celebrate the shared beauty and nobility of human nature, paying homage to humanitarian truth and eternal existence. Your sincere voice will open and reveal your soul, resonating with kindred spirits and causing their souls to tremble in unison with yours. Singing life is a powerful force for spreading humanistic civilization and shaping the customs of the human heart. Singing is a high-level life activity possessing spiritual and cultural creativity. The aesthetics of life is the solemn and brilliant aesthetics of

singing life. Precisely for this reason, sovereign life must sing for itself through philosophy, poetry, and art.

Those who pursue great humanitarian ideals are individuals of monumental life courage, often daring to push life's adventures to the extreme, even if it means being torn apart. Yet even when fate tears them limb from limb, sovereign life tenaciously holds fast to the red line of ideals and integrity, marching solemnly and tragically toward life's end. It is precisely under fate's overwhelming, extreme trials that the sovereign life—never yielding to compromise, never abandoning pride—erupts with human dignity and mutual affection pushed to the limit. This is tragic beauty, possessing the highest aesthetic form, the peak among peaks, the ultimate expression of solemn and sublime personal beauty. The beauty of integrity—that noble sacrifice for freedom and justice—stands as the foremost peak within tragic beauty. "Confucius spoke of achieving benevolence; Mencius spoke of attaining righteousness." The supreme reverence and celebration of this integrity embody the essence of Confucius and Mencius' philosophy of life's value, and indeed the very essence of Chinese civilization.

Now, as the great tide approaches, the moment has come for the doers among this generation of Chinese to charge forward and sacrifice themselves for the ideal of freedom. We must resolutely and universally awaken this supreme beauty of integrity—the essence of civilization and the universe itself. Under no circumstances shall we abandon our ideals or cross the red line of personal integrity. We must never allow future generations to believe that today's China lacks those bold enough to shoulder the weight of the cosmos or to meet life's final hour with solemn dignity.

V. Eternal Values.

Life has only one peak to conquer: the summit of value. The pinnacle of this value peak is eternal value. "Life, life, eternal life!"—This is the most transcendent and noble cry and song. Not only do the religions of civilization affirm and propel life's right and freedom to "pursue eternity," but the philosophy of human life value within civilization must likewise do so.

A philosophy of life centered on individual sovereignty is a theory that dares to push the pursuit of life's purpose and value to its limits. It asserts that the ideal state of life is achieving the eternity of spiritual value within one's worldly journey. We cannot deny that life is fraught with chance,

accident, and uncertainty. Numerous absurdities, dark humor, or disruptive forces may undermine an individual's efforts to expand their capabilities, assert their authority, and extend the scope of their existence. Moreover, certain ambiguous value concepts may even lead individuals astray. Yet sovereign life possesses the extraordinary resources and opportunities bestowed by nature and human civilization. It can expel those pseudo-theories that demean human dignity and deny life's meaning through the humanitarian truth of "absolutely prioritizing the cultivation of people and urging them toward autonomy," and negate life's meaning. Through the Great Awakening and vigorous efforts to create an original civilizational culture and noble values, it dissolves absurdity and disruption. Nurtured by philosophy and art, the aesthetics of life internalize chance, change, and peril as structural elements that shape life's richness, depth, and sublimity.

Absurdity may never be wholly suppressed, yet it cannot assume primacy over life. The inevitable arrival of death does not annihilate all aspects of an individual's life. Eternity resides in what endures beyond the destruction of the physical body—the indestructible existence of human spiritual value. As the origin of social value-driven existence and value-based culture, the individual life itself is a value-bearing entity. Its value manifests in innate qualities such as the capacity for mutual love, self-respecting personality, and personal sovereignty—qualities "worthy of love"—as well as in the noble humanity produced through actively shaping one's life journey—qualities "worthy of love." A life dedicated to extreme exploration, marked by remarkable achievements, pursuing the ideal self and ideal civilization as its ultimate purpose, cannot fail to leave an eternal imprint on human spiritual existence. After the destruction of the physical body, not only will the enduring legacy of their humanized natural creations and spiritual products, along with their life-affirming aesthetic journey of exploration, remain as eternal records; more crucially, the noble character of his pursuit of the ideal self and ideal civilization, along with the authentic, profound, and realized love he shared with loved ones, strangers, the vulnerable, and the suffering—these core details will resonate eternally as "worthy of love" within the hearts of generations to come. These spiritual values, destined to endure alongside human civilization, embody the very essence of eternal worth. The former is commonly known as "timeless

renown," while the latter may be termed "timeless virtue." Both have entered the eternal inner time of human civilization, where they will "live simultaneously" within the value-driven lives and cultures of generations to come, forming the foundational elements of human memory and emotion, and the central themes of inner spiritual dialogue.

Even if seas dry and rocks crumble, even if the earth collapses, human civilization endures, humanitarian truth endures, the heroic names of extreme explorers endure, and the purest bonds of passionate camaraderie endure. This is eternal life, this is the self of extreme ideals, this is the cosmic summit life must ascend.

Every agent of action, every sovereign life that has awakened and risen, owes gratitude to the universal ideals of freedom, democracy, and humanitarian truth. They have granted our generation the opportunity to scale the pinnacle of life's value amidst the millennial political and civilizational upheavals we now confront. We must dare to wield our sovereign freedom, dare to ignite our lives, dare to launch endless assaults upon the summit of value—even if resources prove insufficient, even if we tumble repeatedly down steep slopes, even if icy currents freeze us instantly into eternal statues. Regardless, we are taking tangible action in the right direction. Our stance is on the front lines; our lives are authentic.

Part Six: The Holy Maiden in My Heart, My Greatest Aspiration

To repay others' love and respect with our own fervor, warmth, and heartfelt affection is our fundamental moral obligation—it is the very essence of our noble nature and civilized dignity. We are grateful to our fellow humans who have brought universal civilizational values, global peace, and mutual aid. We must actively embrace our fellow humans. Over the past decades, free and just people worldwide have provided invaluable assistance to individuals, groups, societies, and nations. The pure motives and goodwill embedded in this support deserve our special cherishing. We shall repay virtue with virtue.

Similarly, we must first sincerely embrace our fellow Chinese compatriots. Any dogmatism, any class struggle, any polarizing divisions must be utterly discarded. Any Chinese compatriot who sincerely embraces the universal values of freedom and democracy, who sincerely practices

people's sovereignty and the principle that the world belongs to all, shall receive our affirmation and support. Our revolution in the philosophy of life's value inherently requires and welcomes all passionate pioneers who dare to pursue their ideal selves and an ideal civilization. The aspirations for "eternal fame" and "eternal virtue"—as positive spiritual desires—should ignite within the hearts of those individuals in China's society, currently experiencing a long-term rise in national strength, who possess boundless ambition and dare to shoulder the cosmic responsibility of free sovereignty. For a generation, "when food and clothing are sufficient, people know propriety." A society with economic freedom will likely progress toward political democracy—a natural trend in human history. This statistical pattern holds true in China. Though political democratization arrived later here, it may unfold with greater maturity, depth, and originality. Yet, "it is people who promote the Way, not the Way that promotes people." The natural trajectory of institutional transformation requires conscious sovereign agency to bring it to fruition. Surveying the contemporary world, this wave of authoritarian resurgence—spanning over two decades and affecting dozens of nations—has passed its peak and is now sliding downhill toward its inevitable demise. Western democracies, long mired in appeasement, have begun to awaken. China will soon find itself in a more favorable, multidimensional, and resilient international environment, which will support its own institutional transformation. Meanwhile, China's steadily rising national strength provides ample resources to navigate risks and smooth disruptive conflicts during its institutional transformation. Most crucially, the opportunity to make history has arrived. Opportunity spurs those with resolve. Opportunity will use an "invisible hand" to select the historical originators who positively embrace the millennial political and civilizational transformation of the Chinese nation. Opportunity belongs to any individual who dares to follow the will of heaven and act, who dares to scale the pinnacle of life. Opportunity does not create artificial barriers or engage in class struggle. Opportunity transforms decay into wonder, turning "abnormal deviation from the path" into a more impactful "alignment with the trend." Opportunity possesses a tangible inductive force akin to sunlight driving plants in semi-enclosed environments toward light for growth. History often erupts explosively at the convergence of profound, intense

contradictions; the "unexpected within the unexpected" is the true trajectory of historical breakthrough at transformative junctures. We need not predict the minutiae of China's first stage of institutional transformation. Instead, we should wisely transcend and compassionately focus on building the intrinsic mechanisms that catalyze systemic change. We must dedicate ourselves to forging the philosophical revolution that fundamentally transforms societal values and human consciousness.

We are drawing ever closer to the explosive point of grand history, yet this does not preclude the emergence of grave distortions, nor does it mean pioneers of democracy will not pay immense costs—even endure brutal turmoil. To have the honor of fighting and living for an ideal all one's life—what is there to fear in dying for it? I know what I am doing and what I may encounter. My body and spirit are already fully prepared for reality. Returning to the source, following heaven's way—nothing is forbidden, nothing is required.

In the most agonizing state of my life, with my body and soul torn apart, I have written this document with my own blood—a candid declaration of my fundamental political convictions and profound philosophical revolution concerning the values of life. Should I truly reach the end of my life, this blood-written document shall serve as my political testament to my loved ones, my comrades, my fellow Chinese compatriots, and all humanity.

My loved ones, my compatriots, I love you! My most sincere love and respect for you find their fundamental expression in this document written with my blood. To dedicate oneself is to offer the purest, most noble things. I have already offered you the most noble spiritual values and the purest original essence of life that my heart has recognized and accumulated. I also earnestly hope that those who resonate with me will help disseminate this blood-written document widely, so that contemporaries and future generations may read it and understand my true heart.

As I approach the end, profound sorrow continually wells up within me. Over the past two decades, during my ordeal of enduring over a decade of unjust political imprisonment, countless arrests, and torture in the name of fighting for freedom, my family has borne an overwhelming burden of hardship and suffering. My wife, Zhang Qing, to protect and rescue me, raised our two children alone in a foreign land while battling illness. She

endured pressures unimaginable to most, sacrificing beyond the limits of human endurance. In this seemingly endless agony, her spirit was nearly exhausted. In early January 2021, she was diagnosed with intestinal cancer and underwent her first emergency surgery. Overwhelmed by guilt and anguish, I urgently sought to travel to North America to provide her with the care she desperately needed. Yet, I was intercepted at the airport customs by a ruthless, inhumane, and utterly depraved secret police apparatus and detained in the suburbs of Guangzhou for nearly a year. This deliberate obstruction deprived her of the objective opportunities for life-saving intervention that existed in terms of medical technology, financial resources, and emotional support. On January 10, 2022, my wife departed this world in profound sorrow. She was truly a martyr who sacrificed her most precious life for China's freedom. Upon receiving the tragic news, I wept countless times while imprisoned in Guangzhou's Second Detention Center. My tears for a lifetime have nearly dried up, but my blood has not yet run dry.

My wife's tragic and heroic fate is a microcosm of the destiny shared by a generation of freedom-seekers. In today's world, China has the largest number of political prisoners, the longest prison terms for them, the most civilized and gentle among them, and the most steadfast and unyielding. Within this tragic world record—a testament to a nation's moral stature—lies the unique mystery and truth of Chinese civilization. One of its greatest secrets is this: the wives and families of China's political prisoners embody the highest dignity and integrity, the most defiant spirit, the fiercest resistance against tyranny, and the most resilient support for their families—sustaining husbands or loved ones locked in protracted struggles behind bars. They are not only the spiritual backbone and family pillars for us political prisoners who never yield in upholding the red line of the freedom cause, but also one of the most vital moral forces at its core.

My wife holds the most sacred place in my heart: a bold heroine who dared to navigate the Yangtze River in her youth, a descendant of the Chu people, where women's rights grew naturally, and warriors of both sexes stood shoulder to shoulder. I bear witness through my own experiences and observations: my wife has never bowed before anyone in her life; in decades of interacting with others, she has never displayed the slightest trace of servility or flattery; she has lived her life with such spirit, such pride, such

dignity! Her heart is profound, supremely resilient, and fiercely indomitable—the heart of a freedom fighter, a freedom warrior. She has never once urged me to compromise, yield, or live a life of compromise for self-preservation or the sake of our family. Instead, she has always deeply affirmed, encouraged, and driven me to fight to the end, hold firm to the end, resist to the end—never to abandon our principles under any circumstances. She stands among the most authentic, noble, and exemplary inheritors of the core, quintessential, and radiantly brilliant virtues of Chinese civilization. "The eternal feminine leads humanity upward." My foremost duty is to document and record, with a document written in blood, the steadfastness, fierceness, nobility, and dignity of my wife.

Her steadfastness, indomitable spirit, nobility, and dignity. May future generations forever remember the heroic name of Zhang Qing, the "Daughter of the Yangtze," and never forget to uncover the profound truths of life's highest moral and aesthetic values hidden within her tragic and heroic destiny. May the light within the light never fade!

My duty further lies in returning my wife to her homeland and her mother's side. Should I fail to fulfill this profoundly solemn mission in my lifetime, I implore my kin, comrades, and compatriots to assist me in achieving this sacred wish. Let us finally reunite as husband and wife, laid to rest together forever upon our homeland's mountaintop, eternally accompanying one another through the ages—forever cherishing, repaying, and caring for each other. May justice prevail, may China attain great freedom, and may constitutional democracy and humanitarian civilization solidify as eternal realities for all humanity. Heaven's light shines brightly! Heaven's light shines brightly!! Heaven's light shines brightly!!!

This eulogy I wrote for my wife truly expresses my utmost reverence for her, while also embodying my profound respect for all women, wives, and mothers like her—pure, resilient, indomitable, dignified, and noble in spirit. This eulogy, forged from blood and tears, is my final testament:

To My Eternal Wife

Your year-long anguished cries
have long since torn my heart apart.

As you were pushed step by step toward the precipice,
no matter how fiercely I struggled,
break free from the chains,
nor reach out to save you.
At the end of your life,
I cannot embrace your trembling shoulders,
nor warm your
Your pale, icy face.
In the end, like millions of my compatriots,
watch helplessly as you
fall abnormally into
a bottomless abyss!
My heart collapsed from that moment on,
plunged into profound grief, remorse, and guilt.
My life was severed in two.
Women are the greatest, women suffer the most,
Motherhood reigns supreme.
My dearest wife,
For our children, you poured out your heart and soul,
In a foreign land,
enduring countless hardships and pressures.
Yet I was powerless at your most perilous and painful end,
to fight desperately to avert the danger for you,
nor, amidst your desperate cries for help,
to repay you with even ten days'
final comfort!
My dear wife, for your profound kindness and devotion,
I am truly indebted beyond measure,
Your misery is my grave sin.
Now, my heart
Completely submerged in blood and tears,
I cannot pull it out, nor do I.
I have forever bid farewell to the world's joy,
My fate is sealed in eternal damnation.
My dearest wife,

You are the daughter of the Yangtze,
Even as you stand at the edge of the cliff,
Your eyes remain
bright and clear, holding light within,
the true light of life!
You possess the flaws common to all mortals,
Yet your heart remains utterly pure and clean,
Your strength, dignity, and integrity
have always commanded my utmost respect.
As a couple who have endured hardships together,
enduring for China's freedom
calamities as severe as those of wartime.
This time, you have finally fallen into the abyss,
truly a sacrifice for liberty,
yet the light of your life
will forever remain with me.
Your bright, clear gaze, whenever I recall it,
inspire my reverence, love, and stirring emotions,
and in the depths of unbearable suffering,
to look up and see the horizon.
My dearest wife,
Month after month, year after year, I will weep for you
weeping for you.
I long for my mother to return to her homeland,
I long for the day
When husband and wife are finally reunited,
on the lofty hilltop of our homeland,
will lie together in a great mound,
I will forever make amends to you, for countless eons, my soul
will forever soar with yours
in eternal flight.
I pray that generations of humanity
will forever lament your noble humanity
and tragic fate!
Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)

May 11, 2023

Why the Revolution for a Constitutional Democratic System Must Succeed—Appeal Brief

Guangzhou Intermediate People's Court:

On November 27, 2015, the Tianhe District People's Court sentenced me to six years' imprisonment on two charges: "gathering a crowd to disrupt order in a public place" and "picking quarrels and provoking trouble." Case No.: (2014) Sui Tian Fa Xing Chu Zi No. 1255. Judges: Zheng Xin, Luo Cheng, Lu Xiao.

I hereby file this appeal, demanding a retrial in accordance with the law and a reversal of my conviction. The grounds are as follows:

I. The judgment's assertion that my actions during the Southern Weekly solidarity event "caused severe disruption to on-site order" is grossly inconsistent with the facts. The street assembly held by myself and numerous citizens outside the Southern Media Group headquarters from January 7 to 9, 2013, in solidarity with Southern Weekly, did not in any meaningful sense cause severe disruption to public order: Guangzhou Avenue remained unobstructed throughout; on the actual gathering site—the sidewalk outside the Southern Media Group compound and entrance—pedestrians continued to cross and pass through normally. During my speech defending freedom of speech and demanding democratic elections, delivered around 3:00 PM on January 7th on the sidewalk outside the already-closed gates of Southern Media, no pedestrians were obstructed by my brief presence alongside dozens of listeners. All of this is directly corroborated by the video recording of my speech shown in court, several video clips taken by secret police (State Security), and real-time traffic footage from the location diagonally opposite the speech site. Since the primary functions of the public thoroughfare and sidewalk were fully operational, and no criminal "disturbances" occurred at the speech and gathering site, the criminal assessment in the Judgment regarding "severe disruption of public order" lacks a fundamental factual basis. It unjustifiably inflates a non-criminal state into a criminal one and is entirely untenable.

II. The testimony of officers Zheng Yuming, Zhang Yinian, and Huang Pinqian, upon which the Tianhe District Court based its conviction, claimed that during my speech, they approached to offer guidance but were refused. The live traffic footage comprehensively documents the entire twenty-plus minutes of my speech and presence outside the gate. The footage clearly shows police maintaining order on the main thoroughfare several meters away, yet no footage exists of any officer approaching to intervene verbally. My complete speech recording also contains no footage of police attempting to persuade me. These two video segments directly and unequivocally prove that the relevant testimony of the three police officers is pure perjury. Consequently, the "Judgment" finding that I "resisted and obstructed police officers in the lawful performance of their duties" is entirely untenable.

III. The "Statement of Circumstances" from Southern Media Group, upon which the Tianhe District Court based its conviction, claims that the gathering of citizens in solidarity at the entrance of the Southern Media compound obstructed the normal entry and exit of its personnel and vehicles, "forcing the cancellation of some of the Group's meetings (activities)." This testimony is clearly vague and general, rather than an accurate account of a verifiable specific fact.It provides no specific details or explanations regarding which meetings or events scheduled for what time and location were canceled due to the citizens' solidarity gathering—particularly due to my brief twenty-minute speech and presence. Furthermore, what direct documentary evidence, physical evidence, or witness testimony from the organizers or planners of these meetings or events exists to directly corroborate the authenticity and reliability of these specific details? The Tianhe District Court's ruling that the testimony of gatekeepers Chen Jinyang and Zhang Tichao at the entrance of Southern Media Group sufficiently corroborates the Statement of Circumstances—thereby confirming the statement as verified and admissible—is utterly absurd. These gatekeepers were not organizers or planners of the meetings (events) and had no authority whatsoever to provide legal testimony regarding the existence or the authenticity of the specific details. Their testimonies lack legal validity. Given the absence of testimony from direct participants and necessary documentary or physical evidence, the authenticity of the core allegation in the Statement of Circumstances—that "some meetings (activities) of the

Group were forced to be canceled"—was clearly not verified by the Tianhe District Court. The Judgment's acceptance of this core allegation directly violates Article 53, Paragraph 2, Item (2) of the Criminal Procedure Law. Equally significant is that the Statement of Circumstances bears not the signature of a natural person but the official seal of Southern Media Group. An official seal cannot bear legal responsibility for perjury; according to fundamental legal principles, it likewise cannot enjoy the legal right to serve as a subject of testimony. Therefore, the Statement of Circumstances does not constitute lawful witness testimony and should be excluded from the list of admissible evidence. Based on these two points, the Judgment's additional finding that my actions in supporting the Southern Weekly incident had "serious consequences" ("grave circumstances") is also entirely untenable.

IV. The testimony of Yuan Bing and Yuan Xiaohua, upon which the Tianhe District Court based its conviction, was coerced under sustained torture and beatings during their detention at Chibi City Detention Center in Hubei Province. Yuan Bing's attorneys, Liu Zhengqing and Chen Keyun, have formally requested the Chibi City People's Court to exclude Yuan Bing's confession as illegally obtained evidence. In the testimony of Yuan Bing and Yuan Xiaohua, confirmed by the Tianhe District Court, a serious error occurred where two separate gatherings held on the evenings of January 5 and 6, 2013, by different individuals at two entirely different coffee shops, were falsely merged into one event. This clearly demonstrates that their testimony was a false statement made under duress, distorted to fit the narrative. Yuan Bing himself did not attend the gathering on the evening of the 5th. After meeting with me on the evening of the 6th, he informed me that Yuan Xiaohua had told him state security officers had questioned her regarding her daytime protest outside Southern Media Group. During the trial, I pointed out that the indictment, which relied on their testimony, committed this absurd "two-in-one" error. The Tianhe District Court failed to investigate and verify this, yet still adopted it. Consequently, the details described in the verdict—such as how one person "proposed" and the other two "both agreed" during the small gathering on the evening of January 5th—are entirely fabricated events that never occurred in history! Setting aside its illegal evidentiary nature and novelistic fabrication, the sole criminally relevant detail in their testimony—that I "proposed going in

batches to hold placards"—lacks corroboration from any documentary, physical evidence, or witness testimony. It stands as an isolated, highly suspect, and purely confessional statement. The Tianhe District Court adopted this highly questionable, isolated, and purely confessional element from illegally obtained testimony without any supporting evidence, thereby labeling me as the "ringleader" in the Southern Weekly incident. This determination directly violates Article 53 of the Criminal Procedure Law, which requires evidence to be reliable and sufficient, and is therefore completely untenable.

Initiating, coordinating, and organizing other citizens to engage in peaceful, orderly collective political expression—criticizing and opposing the government in public spaces—is a legitimate political right of every citizen and does not constitute any criminal offense. However, in the Southern Weekly incident, out of prudence to protect grassroots forces, I did not organize the gathering through formal meetings, public proposals, or similar methods. It is universally acknowledged that the gathering of thousands of citizens on the streets outside the Southern Media Group compound was the culmination of a wave of support from tens of millions of netizens on major microblog platforms like Sina, Sohu, and Tencent. This demonstrated the nascent political awakening of China's civil society. The assembly was spontaneous—a historical fact that carries deeper moral value and political significance than any individually orchestrated mobilization. Truthfully, my role in this incident was merely that of a spiritual torchbearer—one who, through the free exchange of ideas and moral influence, helped elevate the already gathered crowd from spontaneous protest to conscious political expression. To claim the honor of being the organizer or "ringleader" of the gathering would not only contradict historical truth but also violate my personal conscience.

V. In summary, the Tianhe District Court's determination that I met the three criminal criteria under Article 291 of the Criminal Law—"resisting or obstructing police officers in the lawful performance of their duties," "circumstances of serious nature," or "serious consequences of the act" ("severe disruption of on-site order,""forced cancellation of some group meetings [activities]"), and "being a ringleader"—are all thoroughly fabricated and false. Consequently, the guilty verdict rendered against me in

the Southern Weekly solidarity matter is entirely erroneous, exposing the court's deliberate fabrication of a wrongful conviction.

Moreover, the Tianhe District Court's "Judgment" blatantly tramples upon fundamental principles of human morality and law. Under the guise of listing evidence, it openly alters and adds sections to my "Court Defense Statement" to achieve the sinister political objective of defaming my character. During the pre-trial interrogation phase, I maintained a complete refusal to make any statements regarding the two matters of supporting Southern Weekly and the "Eight-City Flash Mob." The two so-called "statements" cited in the Judgment Document simply do not exist! My "Court Defense Statement" was entirely a plea of not guilty and certainly not a "confession" in any sense! I explicitly stated in my "Court Defense Statement" and publicly pointed out during the trial that it was utterly absurd for the Tianhe prosecutors to conflate two separate gatherings on the evenings of January 5th and January 6th. Yuan Bing did not participate in the gathering on the evening of January 5th. Yet the Judgment Book deceptively rephrased this passage as my "confession" about discussing matters over coffee with Yuan Bing and Yuan Xiaohua on the evening of January 5th! Furthermore, it fabricated a scenario—never mentioned during pre-trial proceedings, the trial, or in my Court Defense Statement—where I allegedly "argued with Sun Desheng and others" over the "Eight-City Flash Mob" event, and similarly included this in my "confession"! This egregious overreach—where the Judgment arbitrarily manipulates evidence to fabricate and add statements attributed to political dissidents for the purpose of character assassination—represents an unprecedented specter in China's judicial history since 1978!

It is no coincidence that the testimonies of citizens from various regions cited in the Judgment also contain numerous alterations compared to their original versions. In no sense do I believe the testimonies of Wu Yangwei, Luo Wei, Liu Donghui, Chen Junxian, Liang Taiping, Liu Wei, Huang Yonghua, Chen Wensheng, and others reflect negatively upon me. I am deeply grateful for the substantive protection extended to me by friends across the country, and I sincerely apologize for any inconvenience this matter may have objectively caused. The sinister political hand extended through the Judgment, attempting to achieve its goals by fabricating and

confirming spurious testimonies—namely, to completely discredit the civil society of southern provinces and incite mutual suspicion and internal strife among citizens—will not succeed.

VI. The "Eight-City Flash Mob" campaign—where Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing unfurled banners in Wuhan, Yueyang, Changsha, and other cities demanding "The National People's Congress Approve the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" and "Citizens Demand Officials Disclose Assets"—was designed and proposed by me based on my consistent political ideals and operational strategy. Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing voluntarily endorsed and executed this initiative."Flash mobs" represent a novel propaganda tactic born in the internet age. Their operational model involves rapid on-site deployment and withdrawal, capturing photographs or videos for subsequent online dissemination. This inherently prevents disruption of public order at the scene, particularly avoiding the criminal offense of "serious disorder."The photos we later released online from the "Eight-City Flash Mob" clearly documented the actual situation at each location. Typically, only three to five people appeared in the photos, including pedestrians and vendors, with a maximum of seven or eight individuals. These photographs serve as irrefutable evidence that the "Eight-City Flash Mob" did not cause any "disruption of public order" at any location. This evidence directly exposes the testimony of Yueyang police officers Yang Heng and Yang Chengrong, auxiliary officers Sun Youzhi and Chen Tianguang, and security guard Yang Longtao—claiming the Yueyang event triggered gatherings, blockages, and chaos—as pure perjury. These so-called witnesses were inherently biased parties lacking objective neutrality. Their purely verbal testimonies—delivered four months after the incident, without any video evidence, and contradicting photographic reality—are outright fabrications. Consequently, the court's ruling that Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing's "flash mob" caused on-site disorder in Yueyang is entirely untenable. Even if we concede that "disorder at the Yueyang scene" were true, it still falls short of the threshold for "serious disruption of public order in a public place" as defined in Article 37(4) of the "Provisions of the Supreme People's Procuratorate and the Ministry of Public Security on the Criteria for Filing Criminal Cases under the Jurisdiction of Public Security Organs (I)." The guilty verdict thus rendered directly obliterates the

boundary between crime and non-crime.

The Judgment further characterizes the online dissemination of information about the "Eight-City Flash Mob" as "fabricating... false information uploaded to the internet for dissemination, attracting large crowds and causing severe disruption of public order." This determination directly violates the first rule of formal logic—the law of identity—representing the ultimate confusion of legal principles! The "public place" referred to in the Judgment must be a tangible physical space. The virtual cyberspace is not, and cannot be, the "public place" as defined by the Criminal Law. The so-called "large crowds gathering" and "serious disruption of public order" in the online context described in this determination are merely literary metaphors, not legal facts. The Supreme People's Court and Procuratorate's Interpretation of Article 293(1)(iv) of the Criminal Law refers to—and can only refer to—the mass dissemination of false information on the internet causing severe disruption to public order in real physical spaces. It is entirely unrelated to any disorder within cyberspace. Otherwise, this Interpretation would also commit the elementary error of directly violating the first rule of formal logic: the Law of Identity. This determination in the Judgment is entirely untenable. Moreover, it constitutes a heinous, medieval-style persecution of free speech and a literary inquisition!

For the above two reasons, the Tianhe District Court's conviction of me for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" during the "Eight-City Flash Mob" is entirely erroneous and utterly absurd. When the Tianhe Court directly employed literary metaphors rather than legal facts to convict me, it ceased to engage in procedural judicial conduct. Instead, it committed a substantive anti-procedural, anti-statutory dictatorial act—a Cultural Revolution-style tyranny cloaked in the veneer of legal documents!

VII. Both my participation in the Southern Weekly solidarity rally and my promotion of the "Eight-City Flash Mob" activities constituted lawful exercise of citizens' political rights—including freedom of speech, assembly, and peaceful demonstration—through natural use of sidewalks and park open spaces. This method of peaceful political expression via public walkways and green areas is a universal practice in civilized nations worldwide. As public spaces, sidewalks and park grounds remain orderly

and functional when used for political expression, provided participants and passersby or leisure-seekers mutually yield or coexist without conflict. The speeches and assemblies in solidarity with Southern Weekly were peaceful and restrained. Each event of the "Eight-City Flash Mob" was concise and straightforward, without triggering any criminally significant "disturbances" or "serious chaos."All these facts were corroborated by the comprehensive video footage and on-site photographs presented as irrefutable evidence in court. Yet, the Tianhe District Court almost entirely relied on various blatant false and fabricated testimonies—directly contradicting this evidence—as core proof to convict me of "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order" and "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," sentencing me to a combined six years in prison. As the world knows, the true basis for this verdict lies in China's unique stability-maintenance rules—rules that defy natural justice, violate the law, and contravene universal human rights norms. Essentially, the court treated the political advocacy itself—promoting constitutional democracy, defending freedom of speech, joining human rights conventions, and demanding disclosure of officials' assets—along with the very act of exercising these rights through peaceful political expression in public spaces by fellow citizen Sun Desheng and me as the genuine grounds for our convictions. If this were not the case, why have millions of square dancers across China never faced charges of "gathering crowds to disrupt public order"? Why have tens of millions of street vendors never been convicted of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble"?

The above rebuttal fully demonstrates that this verdict violates fundamental facts and legal principles, and that Sun Desheng and I are completely innocent.

This is a case of severe political persecution disguised as "gathering crowds to disrupt public order." China's anti-democratic forces have diverted judicial resources—meant to uphold justice and protect human rights—to frame innocent citizens. They have falsely accused citizens of committing criminal offenses for exercising their political rights in accordance with natural justice and Article 35 of the Constitution. To this end, they fabricated evidence of disorder based on mere hearsay, employed torture to extract false confessions, and deployed vast numbers of police officers, auxiliary officers, and informants (even using seals lacking legal standing) to fabricate false

witness testimony .In the face of public video footage and photographs that directly prove the orderly nature of the event, they persist in calling a stag a horse, inverting black and white, disregarding basic legal logic, and common sense. Their actions constitute the genuine criminal offenses that gravely violate criminal law, and represent the greatest damage to public order and public rules.

In this age of widespread public awareness and information, no matter what "smoke and mirrors" they employ, they cannot conceal their political objective: to obstruct the rising tide of China's democratic movement by fabricating false charges against us, a group of freedom and democracy activists. In stark contrast, our subjective intent is entirely transparent and upright. We act not only to defend the freedom of speech for Southern Weekly's editors and journalists, and to pressure the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but also to fight for the universal political rights of all Chinese people and to establish the fundamental safeguards for these universal political rights. Our pure and profound motivation has never required concealment: through each upright and peaceful exercise of our rights, we aim to propel the tide of China's democratic movement, amplify and strengthen the people's political force as the principal actor, and thereby facilitate the full realization of a pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy on Chinese soil.

A pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy is universally recognized as the "foundation" of modern political civilization. Among the many nations on this planet, it has become a vibrant and thriving institutional reality. Yet, China's anti-democratic forces view this institutional civilization as a "fundamental evil," as an abyss of darkness. For years, they have consistently argued that constitutional democracy is a Western import incompatible with China's national conditions. This constitutes one of their primary grounds for opposition.

Yet when it comes to political systems, what truly constitutes "China's national conditions"?

Over millennia, the Chinese nation independently developed a centralized political system that stands among the earliest and most advanced in world history. This Chinese model of centralization evolved multiple institutional forms to adapt to changing environmental demands: its

vertically controlled commandery-county system achieved a degree of effective, balanced governance over vast territories and populations; Its multi-phase system, six ministries with specialized divisions, censor system, three-department system, and overlapping court deliberation mechanisms achieved a degree of decentralization and oversight; Its increasingly rigorous imperial examination system established a relatively fair mechanism for selecting civil service candidates, enabling some degree of political mobility and social status advancement; Its centralized resource allocation and anti-hereditary elite bureaucracy enabled it to implement relatively equitable land distribution during dynastic formative periods, creating a comb-like landholding pattern. This facilitated large-scale national defense and water conservancy projects, nationwide relief distribution during floods and droughts, cultural reform, and the provision of diverse public goods to the populace. These institutional frameworks and their functional outputs provided a structural backdrop supporting the flourishing of material, technological, literary, and philosophical achievements in medieval Chinese society, while also establishing the longest record of political continuity in world history. However, it consistently failed to resolve numerous severe, even fatal, structural challenges: Imperial autocracy grew increasingly arbitrary and expansive, its share of power becoming ever heavier. This rendered intermediate barriers designed to counter its momentum ineffective or corrupted, damaging the equilibrium of the political system and tilting it dangerously toward absolute monarchical power, where tyranny gradually became the norm; A brutal judicial system, the emperor's bloody purges of dissenters, and the rampant, extrajudicial political intrigue of secret police forces collectively forged a social mechanism for resolving infringements, conflicts, and disputes through the abuse of violence and torture. This not only left the populace severely deprived of safeguards for life, personal liberty, and property but also poisoned the spirit of the people, fostering a culture of violence and mutual harm among both officials and commoners, a social custom of frenzied mutual harm. Institutional gaps led to the interference of imperial relatives and eunuchs in governance, along with unprincipled, rule-less bureaucratic "faction struggles," which eroded and hollowed out the framework of personnel, fiscal, and military systems—the very lifeblood of the state—rendering it increasingly incapable of addressing

mounting internal and external crises. The unchecked extraction of unlimited taxes by the entire privileged bureaucratic class from the lower strata of society invariably drove the populace into survival crises where they could not cope with floods, droughts, or locust plagues; Economic ignorance or imperial self-interest led to suppression of domestic commerce, restrictions on maritime trade, and state monopolization of mineral resources. These policies obstructed the development of a market economy and nascent industries. In an era of a rapidly expanding population, they intensified widespread and severe poverty among the populace. The resulting social and fiscal crises became nearly inescapable.

Throughout Chinese history, the arbitrary exercise and expansion of political power have consistently been justified and supported by Legalist thought. Emerging almost simultaneously with centralized political systems, Legalism encouraged the sovereign—as the engine of power—to exercise absolute authority, act with complete freedom, and rule the populace through harsh laws and severe punishments, thereby achieving administrative efficiency and supreme authority. This doctrine liberated political power—inherently prone to abuse—from the constraints of natural justice and moral values embedded in law, ritual, custom, public opinion, and conscience, whether explicit or implicit. It thus enabled the extreme exercise of authority, proving particularly potent in unleashing the beastly nature of politics.

Much like the interaction between Chinese Legalist thought and centralized political systems, the centralizing movement of the Roman Empire also gave rise to a doctrine asserting that "the king stands above the law," contrary to natural justice and customary law, thereby legitimizing imperial autocracy and centralization. By the late Middle Ages, as the monarchies of continental France broke free from feudal hierarchies toward centralization, this "Roman law virus" found new nourishment, evolving into the renowned theory of "absolute monarchy." Its novelty lay in emphasizing that "the law is the king's command," equating political sovereignty with legislative power. The monarch, holding both political sovereignty and legislative authority, enjoyed complete freedom to enforce his will and interests through law. In practice, royal power did not reach absolute centralization or unlimited exercise, as the nobility served as an intermediary barrier to its momentum. However, at the legal level, the theory of "absolute

monarchy" further stimulated a theoretical reaction against natural justice. The emerging positivist school of legal thought asserted that law merely expressed the will of the powerful, was backed by force, and served as a convenient tool of governance. The notion of natural law protecting fundamental human rights was deemed a pure fiction. The French Revolution disseminated the ideals of "liberty, equality, fraternity," universal human rights, and popular sovereignty across the globe. Yet, at the level of political systems, while it swept away aristocratic privileges like a storm, it unfortunately dismantled numerous institutional safeguards that could have restrained the abuse of power. This significantly strengthened centralization, sowing the seeds of profound instability in France's political system over the long historical span that followed. Yet in Germany's intellectual landscape—a neighbor to France with scant historical experience or political evolution, unfamiliar with the ravages of unchecked power, and generally admiring the positive role of centralization in unifying nations and providing public goods—utopian philosophers emerged. Similarly, in the context of Russia—another neighbor to Germany, and the utopian political activists emerging from the Russian context—a neighbor to Germany that had only centuries earlier shaken off the tribal rule of the Mongol Golden Horde and retained the martial spirit of the steppes—regarded high centralization, even the terror policies that abused the guillotine during the French Revolution, as a positive and constructive spiritual legacy. To advance their new experiment in utopianism and permanently eliminate what they perceived as the "social enslavement" of the poor by the rich, they resorted to dangerous political enslavement—dictatorial methods. This new form of utopianism did not build upon the giants of existing intellectual civilization—freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—to conduct new trials and errors. Instead, it resolutely chose an ideological path that was directly opposed to these very values. Political ideologies advocating absolute power and legal philosophies recognizing no natural justice beyond the will of the strong were fully activated. The political savagery of totalitarianism—unrestrained and unchecked—gained sophisticated philosophical justification and aestheticization. Thus, an unprecedented colossal monster—totalitarianism—was born upon the earth.

Since the modern era, the introduction of Western civilization to China

has fundamentally altered the evolutionary trajectory of its political system, which was already in crisis at the end of a traditional dynasty. After the 1911 Revolution, the Chinese nation shook off the shackles of imperial autocracy and established Asia's first democratic polity. However, failing to resolve the destructive problem of militarily privatized power, this democratic system became paralyzed amid internal turmoil and external threats. The totalitarian utopian movement, which took shape on Russian soil, seized the opportunity and rose to prominence. Through successive alliances with China's intellectual movements and peasant uprisings, its Chinese iteration successfully achieved local expansion and ultimately prevailed in a brutal struggle for survival.

Prior to 1956, the Chinese iteration of totalitarian utopianism primarily manifested as an egalitarian revolution with certain positive implications. It was precisely by uniting with the revolution, compromising with it, and leading it that it seized national power. During the revolution, some impoverished peasants received land, establishing a form of egalitarian private land ownership reminiscent of that implemented in the early years of multiple dynasties; Women, who had endured multiple oppressions for millennia, achieved liberation—arguably the revolution's greatest accomplishment; the privileges of local gentry, patriarchal authority, and clan rights within traditional authoritarian culture vanished entirely; moreover, the common people, freed from numerous discriminations and constraints, gained access to some political, economic, and cultural management opportunities within the new society. However, this egalitarian revolution—which openly rejected the ideals of liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—proved not only impoverished and narrow in substance but also lacking in procedural norms and legal safeguards. In spirit, it devolved into a formalistic worship of absolute equality, its moral radiance dimmed by the bloodshed and injustice of violent land reform, the establishment of a new "caste system," and the destruction of religious freedom.

After 1956, the totalitarian utopian experiment crushed the revolution, castrated the revolution, and devoured the revolution. The drive toward "heaven on earth" through comprehensive collectivization of the means of production destroyed the egalitarian system of private land ownership.

Farmers stripped of their land instantly became virtual serfs dependent on the state as the sole "landlord." This represented an unprecedented regression in individual economic property rights in China's nearly 2,200-year history, despite being cloaked in the glittering garb of "historical progress" and "supreme ideals."The consequences were catastrophic. Urban private industry and commerce were also nationalized. People, already stripped of their limited economic freedom, lost the foundation of their independent personalities and became existentially dependent on the Party-State.In the subsequent comprehensive organization and control of people's physical and spiritual lives, the Party-State nearly devoured all remaining rights and freedoms. Equality among individuals did indeed emerge—but it was the equality of minute cogs within a super-state machine, the reverential submission of bees before their queen or ants before their queen ant, bowing before "demigods" who wielded absolute power and the monopoly on truth. People were equally deprived of sovereignty, human rights, and freedom; equally stripped of their noble dignity as human beings; equally plunged into poverty or destitution; and equally stripped of their living individuality. The limited opportunities for grassroots governance once shared by the populace were distorted into chances for slaves performing arduous labor to be selected by slave masters as overseers, enforcers, or other privileged slaves. Equality became a hollow shell, stripped of its substance, a fig leaf concealing the truth of enslavement.

The moral affirmation of the lower classes by high philosophy revealed a substantive humanitarian inclination. Yet, in theory, it vehemently opposed humanitarianism and criticized theories of common humanity. It advocated class solidarity, which was merely a new hierarchical culture rebounding against the old. Its relentless demonization of the wealthy and internal dissenters far exceeded the intolerance of religious fanatics toward heresy. It fails to grasp the true essence of humanism since the Renaissance, nor does it recognize the modernity of the Enlightenment's discoveries: the discovery of the individual, of personal freedom and human rights, of individual subjectivity and sovereignty. By reducing material pursuits to the core of personal needs, it affirms a materialistic conception of personality that obliterates its spiritual dimension, effectively degrading humanity to a level indistinguishable from animals. The "paradise on earth" it envisions amounts

to nothing more than a state of "distribution according to need" and "full development of individual talents" under conditions of extreme material abundance. Clearly, such a paradise lacks beauty and nobility. How can it compare to the radiant splendor of humanity revealed and affirmed by liberal democracy—the infinitely noble spiritual value inherent in every person, and the personal dignity, sovereignty, freedom, and human rights that flow from it? When advancing utopian ideals from theory to practice, it ought to rationally persuade people to participate voluntarily. Yet in reality, it incites a path of political coercion—anti-voluntary and anti-freedom—where coercion itself is the greatest evil. For the countless bloodstains and skeletal remains scattered across the lands of Russia, China, and other nations, this advanced philosophy—which disregards humanity, denies justice, and openly advocates violence, coercion, centralization, and dictatorship—cannot escape responsibility.

What decisively shaped the reality of China's utopian experiment was not totalitarian theory and culture, but the totalitarian regime forged by its convergence with other factors. This regime exhibits the following structural characteristics: (1) Privatization of Military Power—China's totalitarian system inherited the legacy of military strongmen since the late Qing dynasty, relying primarily on privatized military power to sustain political despotism. It even disdained establishing a legitimate political order for peacetime. The military served as an integrator during 1918-style societal breakdowns, while coups became a cyclical rhythm of high-level political struggles. A naked jungle rule advocating military violence as the ultimate arbiter became the supreme anti-rule of China's totalitarian system. (2) Privatization of political power and creation of a privileged political class—After eliminating early united-front allies, China's totalitarian system transitioned into a full-fledged party-state dictatorship. Party-state integration manifested first as the ruling party's total control and appropriation of the state apparatus.Operationally, it spawned a privileged political class serving as the bearer of the "Party-State" system. At this stage, this privileged class exhibited limited economic privilege, primarily manifesting as an exclusive monopoly on political power based on its clique identity. This exclusive monopoly stands as the core testament to totalitarianism's opposition to popular sovereignty and the principle of the

common good. (3) The Super-State: Implementing Comprehensive Administrative and Social Centralization. The Party-State's centralized pyramid established multiple new vertical control channels, concentrating nearly all forms of power from local to central levels and flattening the residual flat structures of local administrative or supervisory units.Its administrative tentacles extend downward into civil society, which has historically operated in a semi-autonomous state. It entangles and binds civil society layer by layer, absorbs all economic entities, penetrates every association, and forcibly incorporates every factory and village into its organizational structure. It also establishes an ideological authority unprecedented in China's millennia-long history, imposing a web of spiritual enslavement upon the populace.Thus constructed, this superstate monopolized all resources of violence, organization, economy, and thought, achieving a level of centralization unmatched by any political system throughout history. It towered high above society.With the sheer momentum of its colossal mass, it crushes society into a wafer-thin layer. Within this layer, only families bound by blood remain as the last bastions of humanity and reason, stubbornly resisting the erosion of totalitarianism. (IV) One-Man Dictatorship Under Unlimited Power—At the apex of the Party-State's centralized pyramid sat the supreme leader. During the war years, the formal institutionalization of totalitarian politics began with the principle of "one party, one ideology, one leader." Its highest power structure initially manifested as a dictatorship with oligarchic elements, achieved through moderate power sharing with members of the Secretariat and commanders of strategic zones.Following the nationwide victory, the Party-State vigorously implemented comprehensive centralization and subjected all social strata and factions within the Party to a relentless, meat-grinder-like totalitarian rule. This transformed the dictatorship from uncertain, limited power into unlimited power. While comprehensive centralization was an addition, totalitarian rule was a subtraction—it systematically destroyed all external and internal forces capable of criticism or restraint.Thus, not only did no external barrier exist to prevent infinite power from concentrating in the hands of the sole absolute military authority, but no external barrier could restrain this individual, wielding unlimited power, from acting arbitrarily. On the level of inner spiritual life, the advanced philosophy he fanatically

embraced—through its theoretical negation of humanity, justice, law, and morality—helped him untie the many ropes of rational civilization binding the beast within his heart.The reality of unlimited power and the dogma of high philosophy thus combined to cultivate a soul devoid of guilt, indifferent to human dignity, and infinitely arrogant. The liberated beast within him transformed into a political beast driving the chariot of unlimited power, roaming freely through the political jungle of totalitarianism. Herein lies the fundamental, historical, and systemic chain of causality that gave birth to the tyrant.In the war years, he had been the greatest pragmatist, a military genius who crushed all rivals. Now, fanaticism and obsession transformed him into the most dogmatic ideologue of the new society—the ultimate Wang Ming or Bo Gu. His personal ambition grew ever larger: to drive the new society toward a "paradise on earth" through a series of grand projects, thereby establishing "mentor-level" historical achievements. Yet the greater his ambition, the deeper the disasters and tragedies inflicted upon hundreds of millions of people.Yet he never entirely abandoned the utilitarianism of survival instinct. After the twin catastrophes of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1972), the supreme power structure always pivoted back from absolute dictatorship under unlimited authority to a slightly more formal oligarchic dictatorship.Before the second adjustment, driven by the major powers' fear of a united front against China, he pushed for Sino-American reconciliation, a move that severely violated ideological dogma. It was precisely these domestic concessions and foreign mediations that salvaged his last shred of moral integrity.

After 1978, China's ailing society embarked on a reform and opening-up policy. Resource ownership retreated from total public ownership to a structure accommodating multiple components, eventually allowing private ownership to dominate. Centralized planning was abandoned, and a free market economy took root—effectively declaring the historic failure of this inhuman utopian experiment. With the cessation of class struggle, the abolition of the new "caste system," and the partial "return of power to the people" in economic, legal, and cultural spheres, the totalitarian regime of comprehensive centralization and dictatorship transformed into a post-totalitarian system that remained fully controlling and oppressive, albeit somewhat moderated. Regarding the highest power structure, the 1980s saw

a predominantly formal oligarchic co-governance, which shifted to a one-man dictatorship during the 1989 crisis. From 1992 to the present, it has evolved into a limited-term, quasi-formal oligarchic co-governance. From 1978 to 2012, China's economy achieved over three decades of miraculous, sustained high-speed growth. The primary driving force behind this was the arduous labor and creativity of hundreds of millions of people exercising their inherent freedoms in pursuit of a better life. However, the post-totalitarian government has also demonstrated considerable administrative efficiency in accommodating public sentiment and market principles, implementing comprehensive opening-up, encouraging competition among individuals, enterprises, and local governments at the same level, building comprehensive infrastructure to accommodate various industrial chains, establishing strict financial regulatory mechanisms to ensure the smooth flow of economic lifeblood, and fostering an outward-oriented approach to large-scale imports and exports alongside an internal cycle encompassing agriculture, light industry, heavy industry, and the information sector.

Nevertheless, these practical achievements thus far cannot obscure the inherent and severe structural flaws of the post-totalitarian system: (1) The illegitimacy of the private ownership of power—post-totalitarian regimes not only usurp popular sovereignty through the Party-State's exclusive monopoly on power, depriving citizens of political rights and excluding them from core political life while brutally suppressing emerging political opposition, but also enshrine "private ownership of power," "private ownership of military power," and "the Party's absolute rule" as inviolable, unchallengeable foundations. This inherently prevents post-totalitarian governments from establishing moral legitimacy or procedural legitimacy through any self-adjustment or patchwork reforms. They remain perpetually positioned on the opposite bank of the river from the masses' yearning for political sovereignty, their aspirations for a civilized and rational political life, and their need for lasting social stability. Without establishing the fundamental source of legitimacy, the nation's lifeline remains unsecured—this constitutes the most profound crisis and latent threat facing the Chinese nation. (2) The Generational Decline of Core Leadership Among the Political Privileged Class—The dictatorial party-state persists in distributing power and political opportunities within a politically privileged class that has

lost its ideals and is bound only by vested interests. Having stubbornly rejected electoral democracy and severed its connection to the imperial examination system—a tradition accumulated and refined over a thousand years—the Party-State's political talent selection mechanism has regressed to a largely unregulated "recommendation system." Penetrated by family clans and various networks of connections, this regression partially reenacts the restoration process of the hereditary aristocratic system that prevailed from the Eastern Han Dynasty through the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties. After exhausting the residual resources from the only substantive "opening of the imperial examinations" (the intellectualization of the cadre corps), the pinnacle of the Party-State pyramid has fallen prey to the "law of diminishing core leadership effectiveness among political elites," in which mediocrity prevails as the dominant theme. China's foremost political, managerial, and strategic talents now reside predominantly outside the Party-State apparatus.Yet, having entered the global era and amassed super-energy both individually and collectively, Chinese society can no longer bear the sluggish, autocratic rule of an intellectually narrow, inbred political elite. The heights of individual Chinese citizens' lives and of Chinese civilization have both been severely diminished by mediocre governance. (3) The Formation of a Corrupt Privileged Community Under Hyper-Centralization and Institutional Wilderness—The post-totalitarian Party-State's control over every link in the economic process, coupled with its institutional wilderness characterized by external lack of sovereign oversight and internal absence of effective checks and balances, has provided ample convenience for officials to exploit their power for graft and bribery.Within this framework, the Party-State's direct centralization of core economic sectors—such as financial and securities regulation, and state-owned enterprise monopolies—has powerfully propelled a wave of crony capitalism. This has enabled the capitalization of mid- to high-level power and the transformation of elder statesmen's families into financial conglomerates. Nurtured by this crony capitalism, the upper echelons of this politically savvy, privileged bureaucratic class have developed an independent political architecture within the very centralized system they depend on. They have formed an extremely conservative and brutally corrupt privileged community whose mission is to obstruct

substantive political change and oppose constitutional democracy, aiming to perpetuate their political and economic privileges. Its "invisible hand" has reached the apex of the pyramid, effectively subsuming the remaining progressive forces within the Party—including democrats, reformists, anti-corruption advocates, and advocates for national strength—leaving them largely co-opted. (IV) Rule by Malign Law, Secret Police Politics, and Centralization Convenience Syndrome—While the concessions made since 1978 have indeed provided Chinese citizens with greater legal safeguards for their lives, bodies, and property rights, the post-totalitarian regime has no intention of implementing genuine "rule of law" or judicial independence that would constrain itself or require "sacrifices." Its political and legal foundation is "rule by malign law." It has effectively deprived Chinese citizens of their political rights through malicious legal provisions like Articles 105, 290, 291, and 296 of the Criminal Law, whose legislative intent was to uphold enslavement rather than protect human rights.Today, China's economy ranks second globally, yet its people lack genuine suffrage, freedom of speech, press freedom, religious liberty, assembly rights, or the freedom to form associations. They are denied fair trials and protection from torture and abuse. The extreme political subjugation, ideological enslavement, and pervasive restrictions on freedom of action endured by Chinese citizens directly expose the moral illegitimacy of the post-totalitarian regime. Worse still, the post-totalitarian stability maintenance apparatus, while exclusively tasked with suppression, has brutally persecuted dissidents and believers of different faiths, indiscriminately inflicting torture and precipitating a severe human rights catastrophe. This ugly secret police politics, spawned by the runaway second violent apparatus outside the military, has run rampant for a period. Its alliance with the corrupt privilege community represents a fatal cancerous mutation for any political system. Another systemic factor severely harming human rights is the long-standing practice of the centralized regime to "substitute administration for law"—sacrificing or even violating legal norms in pursuit of administrative efficiency.The violent family planning campaigns, the "enclosure movement" seizing peasant land, the "strict crackdown" operations, and the "shuang gui" detention practices—all implemented or supported by post-totalitarian government officials—are classic examples of this "centralized

convenience syndrome." These practices have caused severe humanitarian and legal consequences while leaving deep social scars. Officials deeply entrenched in this system not only failed to fulfill their duty to protect civil rights but effectively became primary violators of those rights.(5) The Absence of Strategic Separation of Powers in Government Structure—While post-totalitarian regimes tout themselves as practitioners of historical philosophy, they actually implement anti-historical geometric constructivism, severing nearly all connections to the evolutionary chain of political systems in ancient Chinese and Western history.Within the government's political processes, legal procedures occupy the most critical position. In post-totalitarian governments, the legislative, executive, and judicial branches appear separate, yet the ultimate decision-making authority for both legislation and the judiciary is concentrated within the executive branch. This highly centralized state provides the optimal institutional platform for unchecked abuse of power, corruption, and even more severe forms of tyranny.

Another highly detrimental form of centralization occurs within fiscal processes. One consequence is that only about 15% of the government's annual fiscal revenue—over 16 trillion yuan—is allocated to welfare-state programs crucial to citizens' basic well-being. In contrast, in developed nations where genuinely elected representatives control fiscal appropriations, 40-60% or more is typically allocated to such programs. Highly centralized governments invariably entail high costs and massive waste. In contemporary China, where wealth disparity is severe and the underprivileged lack healthcare and pension security, it also signifies an omnipotent state. In decision-making and military processes, the decentralized checks and balances and professional standards of post-totalitarian regimes fall far short of those in the Song and Ming dynasties, their inefficiency and inherent dangers being self-evident. The semi-autonomy of local governments under post-totalitarian regimes falls far short of genuine self-governance and flat organizational structures. The severe mismatch between the central government's control over strategic planning, legislative authority, personnel appointments, and primary fiscal powers and the actual needs of local affairs means that core local matters are largely deprived of effective, in-depth governance.

The most significant structural flaw in post-totalitarian regimes is excessive centralization of power, which can become a potential engine of tyranny. During the imperial era, mechanisms such as the Three Departments System, the Censorate System, and the Dual Fiscal System were employed to prevent absolute monarchical power by multiplying the divisions of supreme authority. In post-totalitarian regimes, such checks are scarce. Currently, only the oligarchic system at the apex and the dual-headed system of partial dualism provide some separation and balance. However, the oligarchy is weakening, and the dual-headed system remains a transitional arrangement, rendering the structure inherently unstable. Moreover, the equilibrium point within this three-dimensional pyramid lies not in pluralistic separation but in a structure where power is almost entirely concentrated atop the dual-headed or unitary center. This is profoundly dangerous: any disruption to the dual-headed or unitary center could instantly shatter the balance, triggering systemic shockwaves.

The aforementioned analysis of the evolution and structure of the political system documents a weighty history and shifting currents, while also revealing a reality marked by twists and turns, stagnation, and deep-seated blockages. The fundamental structural flaws inherent in China's post-totalitarian political system today prevent it from achieving moral legitimacy and procedural legitimacy under popular sovereignty. It cannot establish an effective institutional cage of checks and balances to curb and eradicate the abuse, arbitrariness, or even madness of power. Nor can it stably and systematically achieve the political professionalization of its civil servant corps, enabling them to competently fulfill their duties of serving the people's welfare, creating opportunities, mitigating risks, and formulating long-term strategies. This institutional wilderness—forged by the convergence of dogmatic, privileged obsessions and the unrestrained chaos of jungle law and pragmatic expediency—fuels the relentless expansion of the political savagery within the power structure. It continually breaches fragile defenses and restraints, trampling humanity, justice, law, morality, and public decency in an arbitrary, unpredictable, frequent, and even uncontrollable manner. Consequently, the post-totalitarian regime itself has effectively become the greatest violator of the Chinese people's fundamental rights and freedoms, and the most destructive force against public and national interests. This

constitutes the fundamental reality of China's political system today. This very reality provides the most compelling justification for change.

The Chinese people have demonstrated a profound and vigorous thirst for rights and an active commitment to safeguarding them. The inherent logic of rights—the fundamental principles of humanity and justice—dictates that the Chinese people will not settle for an incomplete system of rights. They will inevitably strive for more comprehensive rights, ultimately achieving the sovereign reality of complete self-determination. This reality ensures that any reform merely patching or refining the post-totalitarian regime cannot truly satisfy the people's intrinsic demands. Only through a political revolution—one that utterly abandons the institutional wilderness and political savagery of the existing system—can a new polity be established. This new polity, genuinely authorized and controlled by the people through procedural means, embodies the "fundamental good" of modern political civilization. This represents the true public sentiment and profound will of heaven in contemporary China. The sovereign will of an awakened generation of citizens, coupled with the individual and collective strength they are coalescing to assert their rights and sovereignty, constitutes the primary driving force for enacting this political revolution.

As the "fundamental good" of modern political civilization, a pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy possesses intrinsic qualities that are pure, profound, and systematic. It provides the institutional norms and operational reference framework for China's society—long ravaged by the political savagery of abuse of power, corruption, and tyranny, yet now possessing both the desire and capacity for substantive political transformation—to practice this political revolution. Given China's fundamental national conditions, public sentiment, customs, and historical traditions, this is a remedy precisely tailored to the ailment—indeed, it serves as a universal cure for any nation where citizens, having endured political brutality, possess both the will and capacity to enact fundamental political transformation.

The original meaning of "constitutionalism" is "composition" or "constitution," referring to the actual structure of government and its governing rules. It later evolved to denote a political system characterized by codified principles and rational organization, along with the principles

themselves or their formal articulation. Democracy, simply put, is the people's procedural and institutional mastery over their nation's highest political affairs. Constitutional democracy is the coupling of constitutionalism and democracy. A constitutional democracy is a political system in which, based on a written constitution that embodies humanitarian ideals and natural justice, the people appoint administrative leaders and legislators at all levels through free and fair elections. Simultaneously, within the government, political power is divided, allocated, and integrated through legal, fiscal, and other processes. This ensures mutual checks and balances among the various branches and hierarchical departments of government, thereby placing the government under the procedural control of the people. This minimizes the concentration and potential abuse of political power, ensuring all political authority is subject to the rule of law.

Within the constitutional democratic system, the various effective mechanisms for limiting, dividing, supervising, and balancing power—tried and tested through humanity's long political practice since ancient Greece and Rome—have been systematically integrated. As the latest link in the lengthy evolutionary chain of human political systems, constitutional democracy stands as the brilliant crystallization of human political rationality and operational wisdom. It provides the institutional framework for the practical safeguarding and implementation of values such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Theoretically, it embodies political truth crystallized within institutional reality. Yet this political truth is by no means dogmatic dogma; rather, it is an open, trial-and-error, cumulative, and criticizable political science doctrine that grows increasingly rich and mature through constant challenges and counter-evidence.

The constitutional democratic system possesses the following essential structural elements:

(1) The ideal nature and supreme authority of a written constitution. The American Revolution ushered in the era of written constitutions, establishing humanitarian ideals and natural justice—the people's freedom, sovereignty, and right to resist oppression—as the foundation for political institutions. The purpose of government is to serve the sovereign will of the people and safeguard their fundamental rights and freedoms; therein lies its moral

legitimacy. The regular election of government leaders and legislators by the people enables effective popular control over government and constitutes the legitimacy of its authorization process. This historically and decisively negated the millennia-old privatization of political power—an extension of property rights that transgressed natural justice. Various false ideologies or political fallacies defending the legitimacy of government power privatization, such as the "Mandate of Heaven," "Divine Right," and "the doctrine of conquest" (which is another, more direct expression of the law of the jungle where "military force has the first say"), have since dimmed like fireflies' light under the sun of truth that shines on "popular sovereignty" and "public ownership of power."

The American experience established a great precedent for all humanity: the spirit of a constitution must be idealistic. The constitution serves as the bridge connecting Heaven's principles to humanity, a declaration of human ideals and natural justice on earth. False constitutions claiming allegiance to the doctrine of conquest or the law of the jungle are unworthy of the prestige of a true constitution and cannot tarnish the idealistic, divine radiance of a genuine constitution.

A constitution is drafted by a constituent assembly representing the genuine will of the nation and ratified by the sovereign people through a national referendum or other lawful means. This standardized process of drafting and ratification directly embodies the people's supreme legislative authority while conferring upon the constitution the status of a national political covenant. The supreme authority of the constitution within the political system derives from its dual role as both a human declaration of humanitarian ideals and natural justice and as the nation's political covenant. In light of political realities, to uphold its fundamental spirit, the Constitution stipulates the organizational rules and behavioral norms for government institutions. That is, all government departments must be established and structured in accordance with the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances. Government actions must be subject to the rule of law, thereby placing institutional constraints on governmental power. This makes it possible to protect the people from unlawful coercion and overreach by political power. The Constitution also establishes fundamental legislative principles: statutes enacted by the legislature must aim to protect individual

freedoms explicitly or implicitly guaranteed by the Constitution under humanitarian and just principles. Simultaneously, the legislature is prohibited from enacting laws that infringe upon or restrict individual freedoms. Here, the Constitution effectively serves as the supreme law within the statutory legal system—the very foundation of law.

(2) Universal suffrage under indirect democracy. The earliest Athenian democracy in ancient Greece was a direct democracy, where the majority of citizens, the common people, exercised supreme governance over the city-state through voting in the assembly. This was the original meaning of the term "democracy," which at that time encompassed only the concept of "governance" and not yet that of "sovereignty." From democracy—where the majority held supreme governance—to the emergence of popular sovereignty ideas in the Middle Ages, to Locke's affirmation that society possesses "supreme power," to Rousseau's proposal of a collectivist concept of popular sovereignty, to the institutional practice where democracy means one person, one vote, with a separation of sovereignty and governance power coupled with constitutionalism, and finally to the individualist theoretical reflection that the political sovereignty of all citizens constitutes popular sovereignty—these represent the six major progressive stages in the evolutionary history of democratic thought. Unlike ancient direct democracy, modern democracy practices indirect democracy. All citizens hold and exercise political sovereignty, relinquishing direct administrative or governing power to representatives elected by majority vote. This stems primarily from the vast territories and populations of modern states, rendering direct decision-making on major political matters through universal assemblies impractical. Another reason is that as political affairs grow increasingly complex and governmental structures expand, aligning with the trend of social division of labor, entrusting governance to legitimately authorized and accountable professional elites—politicians—is not only necessary but also achieves greater administrative efficiency.

Popular sovereignty represents the collective sovereignty of a nation's citizens over their political society and power structures. It is not a monstrous totalitarian construct or illusion, but rather the flat aggregation of individual political sovereignty held by all citizens. This resembles shareholders equally sharing equal stakes in a corporation. The division between

sovereignty and governance mirrors shareholders hiring professional managers to run the business, provided it is strictly controlled; delegating governance does not compromise the retention of sovereignty.

The concrete manifestation of popular sovereignty lies in citizens' procedural or remedial determination of a nation's highest political affairs, along with the practical exercise of force to overthrow tyranny when all procedural protests prove futile. The supreme legislative power, supreme personnel authority, supreme oversight authority, and ultimate right of resistance witnessed in this process constitute the core elements of popular sovereignty.

The appointment of a nation's supreme leader, administrative heads at all levels, and legislators through free and fair elections constitutes the procedural political act through which the people exercise supreme authority over personnel appointments. This represents the most significant manifestation of the nation's people's political sovereignty. In a constitutional democracy, the people's authorization to elect administrative heads and legislators, along with restrictions on their terms and re-election, and the power to impeach or recall them when necessary, effectively ensures the principal-agent relationship between the people and the government. Universal suffrage fundamentally undermines the legitimacy of any powerful entity that usurps popular sovereignty. In modern societies, the legal authority of a government's mandate can only derive from a majority vote by citizens or their representatives in national elections—not from so-called "historical choices," "military appointments," or the selection by privileged oligarchs.

One person, one vote constitutes a procedural right and the most vital manifestation of individual political sovereignty. It embodies and sustains the flat structure of a nation's political society, underpinned at a deeper level by the collective welfare foundation of all citizens. Democracy itself originated from the universal rise and equilibrium of legitimate individual force within ancient city-states. The United States, the first practitioner of indirect democracy, successfully balanced the military potential of the presidency or parliament through the latent military power under state sovereignty, thereby consolidating its great political experiment. In today's information age, the widespread rise of individual strength among Chinese

citizens is forging a politically flat structure with a latent equilibrium of power. This provides the historic foundation of strength for the Chinese nation's second democratic experiment. The overarching trend of human civilization dictates that armed violence must exit the political stage, and the rules of the game must shift from "beheading" or "threatening to behead" to "counting heads." The Chinese nation's first democratic experiment was undermined by the "privatization of military power." In the next wave—the second democratic experiment—this generation of Chinese citizens, imbued with lofty ideals of humanity and justice, yearning for sacred sovereignty and freedom, and driven by heroic passion to shape history, has the opportunity to resolve this chronic ailment once and for all. This will strike at the very root of the long-despised law of the jungle.

(3) Separation of Powers, Checks and Balances, Rule of Law. These three elements form the core of constitutional government. Constitutional government is a system that limits power through the separation of powers, checks and balances, and the rule of law. When people discuss government structure or political systems, they implicitly convey the profound idea of using a power structure to restrain power (especially executive power) and prevent its abuse.

Historically, many nations and peoples have experimented with separating military, fiscal, legal, decision-making, or oversight functions within governmental processes. Such divisions often stemmed from natural divisions of labor and the pursuit of administrative efficiency. However, the modern Western separation of legal functions was primarily value-driven: to limit power—preventing centralization, tyranny, and infringement—thereby safeguarding the people's liberty. The germination of medieval popular sovereignty and the "law above the king" concept derived from natural law theory led early modern political and legal scholars to reflectively affirm the concept of "legislative power." They understood royal authority as limited to the execution of laws, thereby giving rise to the doctrine of the separation of powers. Centuries earlier, when royal authority was primarily manifested through military power and had not yet developed fiscal authority, England's feudal nobility—through military struggles and the signing of the Magna Carta—compelled the king to transfer taxation and fiscal appropriation powers to an early parliament composed of noble and commoner

representatives. Thus, constrained by fiscal authority, the English monarchy remained limited in its growth. In the early modern period, when legislative power was explicitly exercised and controlled by the increasingly powerful British Parliament, which held fiscal authority, the institutional practice of separation of powers commenced. Clearly, it was the convergence of separation in legal and fiscal processes, rendering it highly operational from the outset.

Unlike the ancient Greek and Roman systems, where the assembly or senate functioned as the city-state government, the British Parliament initially served as an administrative office within the government where representatives of the nobility and commoners managed fiscal authority. Its deeper significance lay in the people's partial encroachment upon the center of power. Indeed, for a considerable period after the English Revolution, the British power structure featured two major centers of authority coexisting at its apex: the monarch and Parliament. When North Americans took up the torch of constitutional evolution, their power structure evolved into three distinct centers at the apex: the presidency, the legislature, and the Supreme Court. This effectively created a flatter structure at the top of government. The American constitutional practice of electing the head of the executive branch can be understood as the people's encroachment upon the bureaucratic system. This division splits the bureaucracy into two distinct tiers: the elected or politically appointed class of politicians, and the politically neutral class of civil servants. Politicians, representing the people, lead and oversee the civil servants. This severed the traditional ladder of power through which civil servants could ascend the bureaucratic hierarchy. Deprived of access to the highest levels of power and resources, civil servants could no longer expand into an uncontrollable, privileged bureaucratic class. The people's occupation of the centers of power and the bureaucratic system, achieved through electoral authorization, constitutes the primary component of the people's supreme control over the government.

Centralization is the foundation of abuse of power, corruption, and tyranny. When legislative, executive, and judicial powers are concentrated in a single department or even in a single individual, abuse of power, corruption, and tyranny often ensue. Separation of powers involves functionally dividing and segmenting power to prevent its tendency toward

centralization. Checks and balances then impose robust procedural controls on the core powers retained by each segmented department, preventing their monstrous, unchecked expansion. In the American presidential system, the separation of powers divides the legal process among three major branches: the President (the federal government), Congress (the House of Representatives and the Senate), and the Supreme Court. Each branch exercises its primary executive, legislative, or judicial authority while also possessing certain veto powers over the others: the House of Representatives can veto presidential fiscal proposals, the Senate can veto presidential appointments, the President can veto congressional bills, and the Supreme Court can review presidential executive orders and congressional legislation for constitutionality. These veto powers carry profound significance. Each serves as a procedural check against the potential unlimited expansion of a branch's core authority. Moreover, the countervailing power to override vetoes—such as Congress's ability to override a presidential veto of a legislative bill with a two-thirds majority—serves as an effective safeguard of each branch's independence. The mutual checks and balances among the three major branches of government are achieved through the exercise of veto power or the threat of its exercise, thereby fostering compromise. Each veto essentially constitutes a point of political equilibrium within a specific policy process. The multiple points of equilibrium held by the four institutions across the three branches, through their multifaceted interactions, achieve a state of equilibrium within a flat structure—arguably the most ingeniously designed system of checks and balances devised by humanity to date. In parliamentary systems like Britain's, the separation of powers is less pronounced, yet multiple internal checks and balances achieve a certain equilibrium.

Unlike the internal limitation of power through decentralization and checks and balances, the rule of law establishes external boundaries for political power at its very inception through constitutions and statutes. It imperatively requires that all political power refrain from infringing upon the fundamental rights and freedoms of the populace. Under a constitutional democracy, the rule of law serves as a restraint not only on the animalistic impulses of individuals but also on the animalistic tendencies of politics. It governs both the people and the government. Given the relative weakness of

the people vis-à-vis the government, the government prioritizes governing itself. Judicial independence makes the rule of law over government a practical possibility. Beyond the Supreme Court or Constitutional Court's judicial review of the president and parliament, citizens whose rights are infringed can seek redress through judicial procedures when necessary. Thus, the polarized struggle between officials and citizens in a non-rule-of-law state transforms, under the rule of law, into citizens joining forces with the judiciary to check executive power on a legal basis. The historically and structurally unified iron-clad government apparatus has been fragmented, with the outcome significantly favoring the preservation of civil rights. The constitution has long stood on the side of the people first; its human rights provisions often serve as the primary legal basis for citizens to avoid government encroachment in lawsuits against the state or judicial review.

Thus, through separation of powers, checks and balances, and the rule of law, the constitutional democratic system effectively limits power, preventing political authority from interfering with, curtailing, or infringing upon individual freedoms. Government loses the freedom to act arbitrarily and must operate within defined powers, at least refraining from harming the people while serving the public interest.

(IV) Federalism. Federalism is a political system where multiple democratically elected, autonomous local administrative units unite under an elected central government to form a political community. Within this framework, fiscal, judicial, and other powers are distributed between the central and local governments in accordance with constitutional and legal provisions, alongside appropriate cooperation on various public affairs.

A large, distant central government cannot possibly obtain sufficient information or possess enough energy to handle the myriad and diverse local affairs. Local governments and councils exercising governance at the local level enable rational decision-making, targeted legislation, precise resource allocation, efficient implementation, and timely oversight and correction. It avoids the nearly insurmountable structural ailments plaguing centralized governments—such as severe vertical information loss and bottlenecks, high resource allocation costs, and mismatches between decision-making authority and implementation responsibility. Thus, it clearly promotes local public interests more effectively than centralization. This is one of the

advantages of federalism.

The electoral mandate granted by local citizens to administrative leaders and legislators at provincial (state), municipal, county, and township levels, along with their ultimate control over all tiers of government, directly embodies popular sovereignty. Governments may have multiple tiers, and horses may be numerous, but there is only one master. Before the multitude of public servants at various levels, the weight and sovereign status of the people—as the sole authorizing entity—become even more prominent. Equally important, the closer the electoral level is to the grassroots, the greater the share of direct participation local citizens have in legislation, governance, and oversight. Consequently, individual citizens gain greater practical control over public affairs and interests that directly affect them. Local autonomy and grassroots democracy under federalism significantly enhance ordinary citizens' enthusiasm for political participation and their capacity for social management. This stands in stark contrast to the widespread political passivity of citizens in societies characterized by centralized authoritarianism and bureaucratic control. This represents the second advantage of federalism.

A nation adhering to centralization—whether governed by autocracy, totalitarianism, or democratic elections—struggles to eradicate deep-seated ailments like bureaucratic dominance over the people, institutional rigidity, or corruption. Federalism stands as the historical antithesis to centralization, serving as its replacement rather than a complementary system. Suppose a centralized state constitutionally adopts federalism. Whether elections proceed top-down or bottom-up through incremental stages, each tier reached dismantles that level's concentration of power, forming a compact, flat structure within that tier's government. Once the entire federal system is established, the three-dimensional pyramid of the national political architecture is completely dismantled. Instead, a giant, diverse, flat structure emerges at the macro level—flat at every tier, flat everywhere. Within this structure, the central government's tentacles, which would otherwise extend downward to expand its power indefinitely, are severed by fully democratically autonomous local governments. Substantive separation of powers and governance between the central and local levels drastically reduces the likelihood of central government tyranny and the emergence of

authoritarian rulers. Moreover, for each level of government, the sole source of authority is the people, effectively eliminating the hierarchical relationships inherent in centralized systems. The personnel jurisdiction of each administrative unit begins and ends almost entirely within its own boundaries. Conflicts between central, provincial (state), and county-level decrees or legislation that prove irreconcilable can be resolved through judicial channels. The bureaucratic maladies and political culture characterized by seniority-driven ambition, relentless upward mobility, frenzied power struggles, and bullying of the weak are dealt a fatal blow in a federal system lacking vertical power channels. This constitutes the third advantage of federalism.

Large nations are particularly suited to federal systems. Federal states typically divide their territory into numerous provinces (states) under a central government. Their massive, flat structure fosters not only multiplicity at the second-tier government level, but also at the third and fourth tiers. Moreover, it enables diverse political participation and interest dynamics across societal forces. The greater the diversity of political forces, the flatter the overall structure becomes, and the more the aggregate of diverse interactions tends toward equilibrium. Within this environment of extensive pluralism and competition, no single regional power or factional group can sustain long-term manipulation of the central government. Political opportunities and public resources thus tend toward more equitable distribution. Consequently, the larger the nation, the more readily its political ecosystem evolves toward fairness, efficiency, and stability under federalism. This represents the fourth advantage of federalism.

The essence of federalism can be understood as vertical decentralization and the people's ability to exercise control over government at multiple levels and from closer proximity. In the eternal dynamic between government and citizens, the people gain a significant new lever: local governments.

(5) Multi-party System. A multi-party system is a political operational structure in which, under conditions in which the people hold political sovereignty and realistically exercise their right to vote, multiple parties compete in elections and share the governance authority entrusted to them by the people.

Multi-party competition drives the optimal selection of political talent

and the best allocation of political human resources. The sovereign people, through the electoral contests between candidates from various parties, can select the best "stewards." Thus, the people are the ultimate beneficiaries of multi-party competition. Among the political rights held by citizens, the right to vote embodies sovereignty, while the right to be elected represents the potential to share in governance. If a ruling authority implements an electoral system that recognizes only citizens' right to vote while imposing special restrictions on the right to stand for election—whether for all citizens or specifically for opposition members—or even outright bans opposition parties from participating or existing, thereby limiting governance-sharing opportunities to a select group or party, then such elections are neither free nor fair. Since citizens participating in the vote cannot select public servants according to their genuine will, their political sovereignty is effectively rendered largely ineffective. It follows that a multiparty system stands as a testament to free and fair elections and the tangible exercise of popular sovereignty.

Under a constitutional democracy, political parties are associations formed by citizens exercising their freedom of association, united by shared political ideals and cooperative rules. Their primary purpose is to compete for governing power in elections. Before or after an election, they function as political clubs preparing for the current or next campaign. Upon winning, they serve as intermediaries through which the people occupy the centers of power and effectively control the government. Thus, political parties draw voters into national political life, conducting ideological struggles through power contests, and function as extensions of the people's political arm. Madison stated that ambition must be countered with ambition. The rotation of power resulting from multiparty competition reinforces term limits. The pressure of potential future defeat compels public servants to rigorously fulfill their commitments to voters, remaining faithful to the mandate of the sovereign. Even if a party loses an executive election, it can leverage potential parliamentary advantages to exert robust checks, criticism, and oversight on the ruling party through the legislative platform. Modern constitutional checks and balances are largely advanced through such partisan rivalries within government and parliament. This "ambition countering ambition" among politicians, underpinned by multiparty systems,

fully activates the impersonal institutional mechanisms of constitutional democracy—such as elections and term limits. To secure more governing opportunities, competing parties continually strive to propose and implement platforms that better respect public welfare and opportunity. For instance, when one party advances and implements a "welfare state" agenda, its rivals must follow suit. The former party will then propose higher-quality public services. In this long and intense race, where both sides compete to promise and implement policies that serve the people to win their votes, the people once again become the greatest beneficiaries of this "proxy competition game." Moreover, the rotation of power between two or more parties creates opportunities for different political factions within a nation to take turns occupying the center of power and implementing their party's or faction's political agenda. This powerfully promotes a dynamic equilibrium within the nation's political society. Conversely, a dynamic, vibrant political society forms the solid foundation for a pluralistic, balanced constitutional democracy.

At the operational level, in a multi-party competitive landscape, the presence of five or more concurrent parties creates complex alliances and realignments that significantly amplify the influence of smaller parties. This can obscure the true representativeness of parties and their capacity to translate popular sovereignty into effective governance. By contrast, a two-party system offers greater simplicity, transparency, and intensity of competition, yielding more balanced and stable outcomes. Moreover, since modern parties are primarily election-oriented and have largely hollow connections to society itself, whether a country has two or multiple parties does not affect the pluralism of the political society.

The political society constitutes the aggregate of all political behavioral structures formed when a nation's populace, driven by sovereign will and supported by strength, enters a state of political mobilization to seek dominance, control, intervention, or influence over governmental actions. Citizen activities within the political society manifest in several directions: - Seamless participation includes political parties and groups exercising freedom of association; deliberative activities exercising freedom of speech; citizen-driven legislative initiatives exercising supreme legislative power; and lobbying activities safeguarding group or class interests. - Civil

counterbalancing encompasses three remedial procedural opposition rights: - The right to critical discourse - The right to protest action - The right to legal litigation countermeasures. The exercise of non-procedural armed resistance rights is subject to highly restrictive conditions. It may only occur when the government engages in large-scale, sustained bloody suppression of peaceful public protests, effectively plunging the nation into civil war, or when other forms of tyranny push citizens to the brink of survival, rendering all procedural checks and remedial procedural resistance ineffective. The right to peaceful procedural opposition and the right to non-procedural armed resistance together constitute the people's ultimate right to resist. These subtractive elements within popular sovereignty powerfully ensure the practical realization of its additive components—supreme legislative authority, supreme personnel authority, and supreme control authority. They form the foundation of popular sovereignty, bearing witness to the strength and dignity of the sovereign people. Of course, procedural countermeasures—such as voting out leaders who have lost public trust in subsequent elections, impeaching them in parliament, or opposition parties exercising checks and criticism against the ruling party—also partially embody the people's right to resistance. Yet these primarily belong to the additive elements that govern the system's operation.

In stark contrast to the totalitarian-posttotalitarian regime's existing structure—a massive, multi-layered pyramid of "one party, one ideology, one leader" supported by violence and comprehensive centralization—the constitutional democracy system is founded on social diversity and political participation variables: class pluralism, ethnic pluralism, religious pluralism, cultural pluralism, ideological pluralism, interest group pluralism, and civil society pluralism. It is driven by a sovereign flat structure manifested through one-person-one-vote and the domestic strategic equilibrium of the people's rising collective strength. Mediated by two or multiple parties, diverse political groups or factions, and countless professional politicians or candidates, its institutional framework and operational platform are the coexisting cooperation of a small flat structure at the central government level and hundreds or thousands of similarly flat structures at the second, third, and fourth levels, regulated and adjusted by constitutional or legal norms. Its macro-level structural core is a colossal flat structure. This

colossal flat structure achieves a long-term, optimized equilibrium at its endpoint through its starting points of pluralistic subjects, equal rights, and equal opportunities; its processes of intense competition, dynamic rotation of governance, multipolar distribution of the equilibrium points of the political system, scattered distribution of pluralistic decentralized local governments, and dynamic rotation of benefits from political participation variables and interest-based bargaining variables. This is the pluralistic equilibrium of the constitutional democratic system. Compared to the monolithic, highly centralized, giant three-dimensional pyramid structure of post-totalitarian regimes, the constitutional democracy system with this pluralistic equilibrium giant flat structure possesses significant institutional advantages in legitimacy, participation, vitality, standardization, professionalism, fairness, efficiency, stability, and long-term strategic vision.

Having endured millennia of imperial despotism and decades of totalitarian rule, the Chinese nation must utterly subdue its political savagery to empower the people to determine their own destiny and embrace a civilized, rational political life. Following prolonged rapid economic growth, this has become the foremost task in China's modernization and civilizational advancement. As the institutionalization of humanity's ideals of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—and as the comprehensive integration of a system or mechanism of separation of powers, checks and balances, and limitations on power forged over nearly a millennium—constitutional democracy, as the "fundamental good" of modern political civilization, is indeed a highly suitable panacea for China's fundamental national conditions. The rampant diseases of power abuse, corruption, hereditary succession, rigidity, cold-bloodedness, tyranny, and megalomania that proliferate in the wilderness of post-totalitarian systems can only be eradicated through the practices of legitimization, restraint, guidance, and competition under popular sovereignty, alongside the constitutional techniques of separation, checks and balances, flow interruption, impeachment, sunlight exposure, and rule of law, along with the federal system's layered stripping of power and separation of governance, can be eradicated. The long-rampant beast of power can only be thoroughly tamed by confining it within the institutional cage of a constitutional democratic

system. Only a constitutional democracy can liberate the Chinese people from the oppression of power privatization and the shackles of totalitarian ideology, enabling them to truly become masters of the government and subjects of the political system. Only then can the inverted relationship between officials and citizens, distorted by centralized autocracy, return to its normal state, regulated by the constitution and law. Only then can the political life of the Chinese people embark upon the broad avenue of human civilization.

Building a pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy is the lifeblood of the Chinese nation, the very foundation and source of its dignity, freedom, happiness, and glory. The sovereign will of hundreds of millions of people—their rejection of totalitarianism's bloody, brutal history and its present reality of abuse of power, corruption, hereditary succession, and high-pressure tactics; their thirst for political rationality and institutional civilization; their widespread rise in strength and their inexhaustible life force surging toward ideals—all determine that the revolution toward a constitutional democratic system in China is inevitable. This global trend, supported by both Heavenly and Human principles, is clearly unstoppable. Yet, ignorant and barbaric political forces still attempt to obstruct it. For decades, totalitarians have sought to dumb down the populace with one-way information and dogmatic dogma, ultimately succeeding only in dumbing themselves down.

China's anti-democratic forces, anchored by a corrupt privileged class, defy both Heaven's and humanity's will. They denounce constitutional democracy—a universally acknowledged political truth and the institutional civilization the Chinese nation must embrace and uphold—as "fundamentally evil." They persistently claim that constitutional democracy is a Western import incompatible with China's national conditions. They claim China's population is too uneducated for democracy, asserting that implementing it would plunge the nation into chaos and lead to border secession.

Through historical reflection and contemporary analysis, we have clarified that China's fundamental reality in governance is this: the post-totalitarian regime lacks both the will and the capacity to restrain its rampant, corrupt, and brutal political savagery through institutional civilization, nor

can it return power to the people. The essence of China's fundamental reality is that its current political system is pathological—a system of enslavement, injustice, and inhumanity. However, the notion that "this political pathology should not and can never be altered" is absolutely not China's fundamental reality. Seeking a cure for illness and yearning for civilization represent the natural psychological state of society. Seeking a cure for illness, pursuing freedom and sovereignty, and aspiring to humanity and justice are human nature. At any time, the people cannot abandon human dignity and willingly submit to slavery. When power is vastly unequal, the people's silence and endurance testify to their wisdom. When the people have awakened and enlightened, and their strength has universally risen, rising to resist the enslavement of a post-totalitarian regime and the usurpation of popular sovereignty by a privileged class—fighting relentlessly until they are completely freed from bondage and achieve self-determination—this likewise testifies to the people's wisdom and, more profoundly, to their moral courage.The supremely tyrannical totalitarian utopian movement has declared its historic bankruptcy by violating human nature, and the increasingly degenerate post-totalitarian regime cannot escape the same fate. Under conditions where the people possess both the will and capacity for fundamental political transformation, a constitutional democracy—tailored to cure the political savagery and political pathologies—is highly compatible with China's fundamental national conditions. Moreover, its creatively adapted Chinese version will inevitably become the long-term reality of China's national conditions.

The claim that constitutional democracy is a Western import carries an implicit racialist assumption, casting Westerners—who are entirely equal in dignity and rights to all fellow human beings—as an immoral outlier. This argument is utterly without merit. In fact, totalitarianism also originated in the West. Yet its theoretical and moral flaws are unrelated to the racial or class characteristics of its founders and pioneers. Its problem lies solely in having chosen, inherited, and developed a path that has long been in opposition to the values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Forcing this path upon any nation or people will inevitably lead to catastrophic consequences. Contempt for Western "imports" implies a commitment to indigenous culture. Yet the brutal truth is that totalitarianism

orchestrated the catastrophic destruction of China's traditional culture in the 1960s. Politically, it discarded millennia of the Chinese nation's accumulated political experience and institutional heritage as worthless dross. This reveals the deep-seated national inferiority complex inherent in those who worship power. Rational civilization is universal—a global family, timeless and universal. Severing historical continuity is tantamount to reverting to the starting point of ignorance. Contemporary Chinese idealists of freedom and democracy cannot help but hold profound respect for the institutional civilizations and multicultural heritage accumulated over millennia by all nations, including the Chinese. The future Chinese constitutional democracy will fully incorporate viable elements from ancient Chinese institutions, such as the censorate and the tripartite decision-making system. It will also embrace political principles and operational rationality from classical civilizations such as ancient Greece, Rome, Persia, Arabia, India, and Egypt. Regarding the neutral evolutionary sprouts and harmless operational models within China's totalitarian and post-totalitarian systems over the past decades, practitioners will rationally discern, steadily transform, and inherit them.

In terms of scientific and cultural literacy, are today's Chinese people less capable than Americans in 1828 or Britons in 1918? Those nations had already granted universal suffrage by those times—why should today's Chinese be any different? Currently, millions of university graduates emerge annually in China, propelling society toward a knowledge-based era. The public has developed robust independent character, sound rationality, moral sensibilities, ethical principles, and a spirit of public service. Even the peasant class, often disparaged as the "ignorant masses" by the bureaucratic elite, has weathered decades of turbulence in the market economy. Widespread independent entrepreneurship has broadened their horizons, fostering prudent management and demonstrating exceptional operational capabilities. Their actual intellectual prowess is no less than that of the urban working class and middle class, nor is it inferior to that of the peasantry in any democratic nation worldwide! As for their moral integrity, credibility, diligence, and pragmatic qualities, these have always been held in high esteem. In short, the human capital of China's populace has long been more than sufficient to meet the requirements of constitutional democracy. In this

universally enlightened information age, the social conditions necessary for China to initiate its constitutional democratic process are not merely ripe—they are overripe! Exercising the most crucial right of one person, one vote to select suitable public servants requires the people to primarily employ moral conscience and common sense judgment—do the people lack these? These are precisely the strengths of the people! Admittedly, citizens who have long been excluded from core political life may still lack certain capacities for social governance. This means that local autonomy—a vital need for the people—will require years of experimentation and refinement before maturing. But this absolutely does not justify denying or delaying the people's opportunity to learn and participate in local self-governance. On the contrary, it is precisely why the people should be allowed to engage in democratic practice and learn local self-governance as soon as possible!

After achieving substantial economic and cultural progress through arduous labor and creativity, the Chinese people still hold a conservative view of the good life. The politically emerging generation of awakened citizens demands dignity, sovereignty, and freedom—seeking to build upon material progress to establish a noble and fulfilling spiritual life and a rational, civilized political life. The Chinese nation has long grown weary of the suffering brought by bloodshed and turmoil. Against the backdrop of peace, stability, and growth, the orderly advancement of constitutional democracy is truly a consensus shared by all. For years, China's forces advocating freedom and democracy have steadfastly pursued peaceful opposition. Over the past decade, they have further advanced citizens' dignified exercise of political rights through rights defense movements, using human rights and rule-of-law initiatives to help society dispel violent tendencies. Across the Central Plains, no political force has demonstrated a profound desire to plunge China into turmoil and division, nor does any political force possess the capability to drag a China characterized by economic development, advanced information networks, and high levels of consensus into chaos and fragmentation. Claims that democracy would plunge the nation into chaos are nothing but alarmist rhetoric—a vicious smear against citizens asserting their sovereignty and pioneers advancing constitutional democracy. Such rhetoric insinuates that the Chinese people are inherently unsuited for a world governed by public welfare, shared

power, and self-determination, and that only submission to authoritarian rule can bring stability. As for the issue of border secession, one need only observe the mainstream sentiment of the Chinese nation and the objective reality that the Han ethnic group constitutes 94% of the population to understand that any attempt to sever border regions by any means is technically unfeasible. On border matters, proponents of China's constitutional democracy should learn from England's integration of Scotland while heeding the lessons of the American Civil War. Humanity and human rights must be the overriding consideration. Prioritizing righteousness inherently includes pursuing benefit. The fundamental solution to frontier challenges lies in genuinely respecting human rights, guaranteeing religious freedom, enabling all ethnic groups to share political sovereignty and economic opportunities, and implementing appropriate weighting for cultural and educational development. Frontier challenges should not become roadblocks hindering the Chinese nation's pursuit of a lasting institutional civilization. Instead, we should view their resolution as an opportunity to forge a diverse and inclusive system that makes possible the vision of a Tang Dynasty-like embrace or an American "melting pot" within contemporary China.

We must refute the various falsehoods spread by anti-democratic forces aimed at undermining China's constitutional democracy movement to prevent them from misleading the public. However, we must respect those who sincerely affirm the values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, while expressing differing views on the operational strategies of constitutional democracy, refining ourselves through mutual exchange and challenge. Diverse competition is first and foremost a moral imperative, with strategic value as well. Not only different ideologies but also different political or social forces should be embraced by China's constitutional democracy movement, provided they demonstrate a degree of constructive engagement. We welcome the emergence of healthy forces within the Chinese Communist Party—democrats, reformers, anti-corruption advocates, and advocates for national strength—who decisively break free from the grip of the corrupt and privileged elite. We encourage them to courageously embrace the historic opportunity for democratization, learn from Taiwan's Kuomintang's experience, and transform the CCP into a

modern electoral party capable of enduring and thriving within a constitutional democratic system. To those who view constitutional democracy as an abyss within the post-totalitarian stability maintenance system, we offer this counsel: underpinned by the bedrock of humanity and justice, constitutional democracy—defined by goodwill, moderation, and tolerance—can never be an abyss for any opponent or competitor. As the iron walls of totalitarianism melt away under the light of universal values, all who embrace goodness, achieve merit, and exercise restraint have the right to share in the boundless opportunities for development under a constitutional democracy.

Guided by Heaven's Way, we follow only the Way of Humanity. This generation of Chinese bears the historic mission of conducting the second democratic experiment for the Chinese nation and transforming a pluralistic, balanced constitutional democracy into an institutional reality on Chinese soil. This requires an awakened generation of citizens to demonstrate formidable moral courage, continuously launching peaceful opposition and enlightenment actions against totalitarianism to accelerate its external dissolution and internal transformation. It demands that this awakened generation exhibit the political wisdom to rally and unite the overwhelming majority of compatriots, shifting the balance of power in favor of the people and propelling the constitutional democratic revolution through the collective strength of the people. It further requires a generation of awakened citizens to unleash their imaginative freedom, synthesizing political institutions and operational wisdom from ancient and modern times, East and West, to create a historic original Chinese version of the constitutional democracy system. As the "fundamental good" of modern political civilization, constitutional democracy serves only as a normative guide for concrete practice—a framework reference for engineering blueprints—and is by no means the blueprint itself. On the path of political revolution, China cannot replicate or transplant any nation's system. Given the causal relationship between centralized authority and its strong constraints—weak freedoms—and frequent tyranny, dismantling centralized authority is an inevitable necessity for China's political revolution. To this end, we must learn from and draw upon the American federal system. However, China should not follow the early American model of limiting the central

government solely to military and foreign affairs. For a significant period of its early development, the central government needs to retain considerable authority over economic regulation and planning, welfare-state arrangements, human rights protection, and the management of scientific, technological, and cultural systems. A small yet capable government is preferable, but the laissez-faire philosophy should not become China's dogma. A viable governing philosophy must strike a balance between moderate proactive engagement and high-quality, low-cost governance—all while ensuring freedom from coercive power. Institutional innovation is indeed a dream people yearn for yet struggle to achieve. Yet the closer we stay grounded and the more we trace back to fundamental principles, the greater our chance of realizing that dream.

The revolution toward a constitutional democracy is not a quiet, cold construction project of institutional frameworks led by a few elites. Rather, it is a process of institutional arrangement, experimentation, adjustment, consolidation, and operation—driven by the exercise of sovereignty and the realization of rights—in which the citizenry themselves actively participate and take charge. The people are both the builders of the institutional stage and the performers upon it. The people are the subjects of the system; the people's rights are its soul. In the course of a political revolution, the revolution of rights among the subjects occurs simultaneously with the revolution of the object-like system. Through political revolution, the people transform from commoners under a post-totalitarian regime—deprived of political rights, constrained in speech and action, and subjected to the bullying of a privileged bureaucratic class—into true sovereigns who possess full political rights, speak freely, and move freely across the land. In revolution, the people gain not only the complete liberation from the chains of servitude and the restoration of a government that was once usurped, alienated, and out of control, but also a tremendous increase in individual rights within the subject itself—this must be called a revolution of rights. In a constitutional democracy, the people do not passively withdraw into private affairs while entrusting elected public servants to exercise governance and manage the core machinery of checks and balances under the separation of powers. No, the people's political life is highly active! They participate in constitutional decision-making and elections, granting

legitimacy to political power through electoral authorization. The people exercise their rights, implementing effective popular control over the separate branches of government and parliament. When public servants become negligent or abuse their power, the people can counterbalance them through civil checks by exercising their rights to free speech, protest, and judicial recourse. The people also strengthen their direct participation in governing local affairs that affect immediate public interests and personal concerns through tiered platforms of local self-governance. The people can also establish tangible channels for participation in and oversight of legislative authority through citizen-led legislative initiatives and national referendums, among other means. Economic freedoms, religious freedoms, freedom of movement, and the right to a fair trial are likewise fully guaranteed and actively exercised. If the accumulated rationality of human civilization throughout history is internalized as the subject's conscience, then the subject's rights are the institutionalized civilization crystallized within the individual.

What are rights? Rights are the autonomous activities and their scope that individuals assert and vigorously defend—activities endowed by humanity, regulated by justice, respected and safeguarded by institutional civilization. The revolution of rights stands as one of the most significant fruits of the revolution in political systems. The core of the constitutional democratic political revolution lies in establishing the absolute nature of fundamental individual rights and the state's and government's orientation toward the greatest public good—that is, guaranteeing the fundamental individual rights of all citizens.

What, then, are the state and government? They are neither organic entities formed by countless individuals nor mere aggregates of persons, but rather behavioral structures emerging from the interactions of numerous individuals. Existing as secondary phenomena, they possess no authority to supersede living, substantive, sovereign individuals. Revolution must return to the individual, liberate the individual, and civilize the individual—it must never allow institutional machinery to obliterate the person.

Constitutional democracy highlights the subjectivity of individual citizens through spiritual values and institutional frameworks. Under this system, the individual is not only the end but also the starting point.

Sovereign citizens are the origin of the system—they are the legislators, the grantors of authority, and the agents of renewal. Constitutional democracy also pioneers unprecedented humanitarian political space, effectively achieving the core goal of regulating political savagery through political reason. It compels the machinery of political power to operate within the bounds of "government of the people, by the people, for the people," thereby transforming this alien entity—long enslaving the populace in violation of humanity—into a tool safeguarding individual liberty through humanity and humanism.

Political life is one of the core social dimensions that determines the fate of every human individual. Political engagement is an essential aspect of human nature as social and spiritual beings, and political sovereignty and rights constitute vital components of personal liberty. Yet past authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, through violence and deception, not only stripped citizens of their political rights but also instilled fear, apathy, passivity, and indifference toward politics. This effectively neutered the political nature of human individuals, fostering widespread pathological and atrophied personalities. Constitutional democracy restores this political nature to human beings by awakening citizens' political consciousness of sovereignty and rights, and by helping them overcome widespread political phobia and apathy through the practical exercise of these rights. This process achieves the individual's freedom from the subject and the integrity of human nature. Within a constitutional democracy, citizens fully exercise their political rights both within and outside institutional frameworks. They actively participate in electoral empowerment, political competition, free speech, protests, grassroots self-governance, and other political activities, enjoying the dignity, transparency, rational civility, and vibrant political life befitting sovereign subjects. This natural state of political existence represents both a return to humanity and the development of human nature.

The rich, inherent humanistic and human rights content within the constitutional democratic revolution has provided immense spiritual elevation to China's awakened citizens and a generation of freedom and democracy advocates. Compared to advanced democratic nations, we indeed require historic remedial work on our political institutions—yet this cannot remain utilitarian or superficial. The people aspire upward; they yearn for

spiritual dignity, for humanity is fundamentally a historical spiritual being. The people's yearning for humanity and justice, their pursuit of political sovereignty and rational civilization, must be the foremost consideration in institutional reform. The constitutional drafting phase of a political revolution inevitably requires "top-level design," but the authorizing and approving power can only reside with the sovereign people, not with political strongmen who presume to rule on their behalf. We absolutely reject any force that seeks to perpetually relegate the sovereign people to political passivity, reducing them once again to objects of change rather than genuine agents of transformation. China's future political system must be a pluralistic, balanced constitutional democracy genuinely led, guided, and controlled by the sovereign people—never an authoritarian regime masquerading as democracy under manipulated elections, akin to the models of Lee Kuan Yew or Putin. In China's future constitutional democracy, citizens will fully exercise their rights and actively participate in all levels and forms of political life. We must never repeat the mistakes of some imperfect electoral nations where citizens return to passive inaction after the ritual of voting every few years. Citizens will enjoy the substantial expansion of fundamental rights and freedoms brought about by a rights revolution occurring in tandem with the institutional revolution. They will naturally, freely, and healthily express the political dimension inherent in human nature within sovereign life, where procedural or remedial procedures govern the highest political affairs. They will tangibly experience the humanity of their sovereign political existence and the humanity of political power operations effectively controlled by all citizens. The lofty spiritual dimension of the people demands that our humane politics not only cultivate moral elevation but also foster the elevation of individual life value. This presents a higher direction for our political revolution: to help hundreds of millions of sovereign individuals institutionalize and solidify their vibrant, original political participation through procedures, and to elevate it through theory; to help them achieve the sublime spiritual dignity, peak experiences, and radiant fulfillment of free, sovereign individual lives within the profound national celebration of constitutional democracy; to help Chinese citizens reach the heights their lives deserve; and to help Chinese civilization reach the heights it deserves.

The above represents the profound motivation behind my long-term engagement in political opposition activities as an advocate for constitutional democracy in China. It also underpins my participation in street protests supporting Southern Weekly and my role in organizing the "Eight-City Flash Mob" campaign to promote awareness of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As for the positive, constructive, and beneficial outcomes of these two direct actions, I have already provided ample factual evidence in my Court Defense Statement. Judges of the Guangzhou Intermediate People's Court, will you overturn my conviction based on facts and legal principles, or will you join the chorus of China's anti-democratic forces in political persecution—ignoring truth and justice—by upholding the original verdict? Please deliberate carefully before making your decision.

Appellant: Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)
December 3, 2015

People's Sovereignty: My Commitment and Dream

—Court Statement

Nineteen Eighty-Four—the title of Orwell's masterpiece, and the year I first entered the struggle for freedom and democracy.

That year, on a bitterly cold November evening, in the cafeteria at East China Normal University's West Campus in Shanghai, I had the privilege of hearing a speech by an elderly man. His face was as sharp and rigid as if carved by a knife, his short, thin frame almost entirely swallowed by a gray trench coat. Speaking in Mandarin with a sharp Jiangsu-Zhejiang accent, he directly criticized Deng Xiaoping, the paramount leader at the time, for his rigid thinking, imposing ideological constraints on society, and routinely suppressing writers' creative freedom through political criticism. This respected elder was named Wang Ruowang. Having arrived in Shanghai less than three months earlier from a mountainous county in northwest Hubei, I witnessed for the first time in my life someone publicly denouncing the nation's supreme leader. The profound impact on my soul was beyond description.

Shanghai was then immersed in an unprecedented "mini-spring" of free thought. That summer, the enlightened politician Hu Yaobang reversed the previous ultra-leftist backlash and declared at the Fourth Congress of the Writers Association that political power would no longer interfere with writers' creative freedom. Inspired by this, liberal-minded professors, scholars, and writers in Shanghai erupted with intense political and intellectual fervor. Like creatures stirring in spring, they took to university lecture halls, academic seminars, salons, and cafés, voicing cries for intellectual freedom and political reform. It seemed as if an invisible hand guided them in a competition—a contest to see who could introduce Western modern cultural trends in the most novel, profound, and multidimensional ways; who dared speak more truths; who dared confront the themes of anti-authoritarianism and the struggle for democracy head-on. Mr. Wang Ruowang was among the boldest of these free-thinking writers. Truthfully,

these disseminators of freedom and their nationwide comrades-in-arms may have lacked academic rigor at the time. Yet their words and deeds radiated the fearless, impassioned intellectual spirit of French Enlightenment scholars, revealing the primal idealism, innocence, and simplicity inherent in the human spirit. In a sense, this laid the spiritual foundation for China's freedom and democracy idealists over the subsequent three decades. I myself was enlightened during this "mini-spring," benefiting from the bold, open, and diverse discourse of these freedom advocates. As a philosophy student, my knowledge base may have leaned slightly toward the absorption and ruminative engagement with theoretical resources in classical Chinese and Western texts. Yet in terms of the formation of my spiritual character and political orientation, I am a child of the liberal spirit of the 1980s.

From the period around listening to Mr. Wang Ruowang's lectures onwards, I became a restless attendee of various academic lectures and political discussions, as well as an on-site "bystander" to campus events like football fan riots and cafeteria sit-ins—incidents tinged with youthful restlessness. During those years, people grew increasingly intolerant of the confinement and oppression under post-totalitarian rule. A potent political pulse of direct action fermented among young students, finally erupting in the December 1986 student movement. Shanghai, nourished by the "mini-spring," became the epicenter of that uprising. My first genuine commitment to autonomous decision-making—embracing the high-risk nature of the freedom and democracy movement—began with the grand march on December 22, 1986. To this day, I vividly recall the tension I felt as our small group held banners on Shanghai's vast People's Square, suddenly confronted by thousands of young workers surging toward us with heavy footsteps. By the time the sweeping nationwide student movement erupted in 1989, I was teaching at a college in Wuhan. As with the 1986 protests, I took direct action as a free intellectual—solely out of a sense of duty, and nothing more. Over the next decade or so, whenever I returned to Wuhan, I would sometimes linger at the spot where I had once stood to speak, or recall the lightning-fast moments of crisis—like when a young student suddenly mimicked a movie scene and shouted "Charge!" triggering hundreds (perhaps thousands?)causing the Yangtze River Bridge beneath our feet to writhe like a serpent in that terrifyingly surreal moment. Deep within, I understood: my

life had become inextricably bound to that era.

The massacre of peaceful student protesters and citizens on Beijing's Chang'an Avenue on June 4, 1989, stands as one of the most heinous events in human history. It wrenched the Chinese government and Chinese society into utter rupture. From that moment, I resolved never to compromise with tyrants who slaughter innocent people. From that moment, I resolved to dedicate my life to China's cause of freedom and democracy—to fulfill my duty, endure peril and hardship, and carry out Heaven's will. Later, we learned that from the darkest hour, countless indomitable spirits across China—almost like isolated islands in an ocean of mutual ignorance—simultaneously launched a new wave of primitive exploration in the political opposition movement. Over a decade, a generation of activists—myself included—experimented with various forms of peaceful resistance, much like Shennong tasting hundreds of herbs. It wasn't until the mid-to-late 1990s that liberal political thought reached China, fostering the intellectual maturation of its freedom and democracy idealists. Then, at the turn of the century, the sudden advent of the internet era connected these long-exploring, unknowing fighters scattered in the vast fog into a network. Finally, between 2003 and 2005, the rights defense movement—a pragmatic force of constitutional liberalism—took shape. This marked the emergence of a highly original, deeply rooted, and indelible path for the expansion of China's political opposition movement.

On January 28, 2005, Fan Yafeng and I emerged from the farewell ceremony for Mr. Zhao Ziyang at Beijing's Babaoshan Cemetery. With a heavy heart, I carried a large photograph of Mr. Zhao as I walked along the sidewalk. Opposite us stood numerous police officers. Glancing back toward the funeral hall, I saw a winding, black dragon of people—those who had attended the farewell ceremony—queued outside.I asked Fan Yafeng: "How many people do you think there are?" He paused briefly before answering: "Today alone, at least two or three thousand!" At that time, I was discussing with Fan Yafeng and others how to foster effective grassroots connections. Over the following days, we deliberated repeatedly and reached a shared conclusion: Unlike the open and legal circumstances surrounding the 1989 memorial for Comrade Hu Yaobang, attending Comrade Zhao Ziyang's funeral ceremony occurred during an era of high-pressure control.

Authorities required each participant to register and authenticate their identity with an ID card. This served as a sword of Damocles, carrying latent risks that deterred many. Yet thousands still chose to attend, proving that moral courage was resurging and democratic momentum was gathering strength. Guided by this subtle political indicator, we resolved to take bold, decisive, and sustained action to elevate the democracy movement to a new stage. Within half a year, an unprecedented cluster of political, legal, and ideological movements emerged. This symbolic interlude bears witness to the spiritual kinship between the rights defense movement and the 1989 student movement, and to how activists draw strength from sharing destiny with the noble spirit of the departed great man and from the eternal 1989 generation, whose spirit of freedom remains undimmed.

Through collective strength, we conducted open, procedurally sound activities within the neutral legal space—even acknowledged by the ruling authorities—to defend citizens' human and political rights while promoting the ideals of freedom, democracy, and constitutional governance. The individual rights defense cases and political experiments we championed, such as the Bible printing case of Cai Zhuohua and the village official recall case in Taishi Village, fermented and spread through the internet's accelerator and amplifier, sparking widespread sympathy and multidimensional engagement from civil society. An increasing number of freedom-loving idealists have bravely stepped forward. More and more isolated fighters, once battling alone, have connected through participation in rights defense or relay hunger strikes. A growing number of marginalized resisters whose rights have been violated have embarked on a conscious path of political rights defense, aided by heroic rights defense lawyers. Light spread across the four corners, stars gathered from all directions, converging into a mighty torrent. Through this convergence of diverse forces, China's political opposition movement surged from forced marginalization back into the mainstream of public civic life. Its surging momentum, escalating wave by wave, triggered acute fear within the post-totalitarian stability maintenance apparatus, prompting brutal suppression.

As one of the movement's earliest conceptualizers, organizers, and frontline activists, I repeatedly bore the brunt of this crackdown. From April 2005 to the present, I have been criminally detained four times, with the third

resulting in a five-year prison sentence. During these four detentions, I was held across six detention centers—two provincial, two municipal, and two county-level facilities. The police and secret police conducted over 200 interrogations of me—a record number. Sometimes they would have convicted prisoners carry me, dazed and weak from hunger strikes, up to the fourth floor on stretchers multiple times a day, then strap me to an iron chair. During these four detentions, I went on hunger strike five times, totaling 3 days + 59 days + 24 days + 75 days + 25 days = 186 days. My intense hunger strikes elicited strong responses from the freedom camp, playing a pioneering or exemplary role in the 2006 relay hunger strike movement. Later, however, friends holding secular humanist positions kindly expressed their puzzlement: "Liberal democracy advocates humanity and acknowledges reasonable self-interest. You constantly starve yourself, inflicting such suffering—it seems contrary to human nature and of little significance." Unwilling to engage secular humanism with "grand principles" face-to-face, I never formally addressed this critique. Inadvertently, my hunger strike diaries or memoirs ceased to be updated, and related advocacy efforts were abandoned. Yet when necessary, I still undertake personal hunger strikes—why? Why do I fast? Why persist in fasting? From start to finish, my answer has been clear: I fast not only to express fierce protest against the political persecution of totalitarian systems, but primarily to prove myself—to bear witness before myself and the supreme deity eternally dwelling within my heart that I am sincere, suffering for the pure ideals of liberty and democracy, and upholding the immaculate purity of my soul that must never be defiled. Tracing its origins, the primal model of hunger strike is the asceticism of monks, who push their bodies to the limit for some ideal. My actual hunger strike is safe and controlled; the process is dignified. The respect of onlookers goes without saying, but what matters most is not external reaction, but inner experience. After my first hunger strike, I was astonished to discover that the walls I had once overlooked were so pure and white. In my reverie, I suddenly understood the profound sanctity of devout believers' hearts. Even I, entangled in the tumult of worldly affairs, found an opportunity to break free from earthly bonds and walk toward spiritual purity.Each time, after the prolonged physical exertion, the clarity and insight that followed made me feel as if the impurities of the

world and my own heart had been filtered away. The structural, institutional ideals of freedom and democracy we pursued transcended personal fate, rose above success and failure, revealing a "divine presence on earth" that was both transcendent and masterful over the mundane. It was worth the sacrifice, worth immersing one's life in. Though not always the case, there are sustained moments of profound beauty when I tangibly sense: as one suffering for freedom and democracy, I am fortuitously sharing or reflecting the eternal divine within my soul. That radiant image is experiencing a pure spiritual joy pointing toward the ultimate. For our fleeting, mundane lives, what is eternity? Eternity is precisely such a moment.I never advocate that others emulate my extended hunger strikes; the 2006 relay hunger strike movement required participants to fast no longer than 48 hours. Yet I never believed hunger strikes contradict human nature. On the contrary, they are a powerful tool of peaceful resistance, an expression of the inner strength of freedom and democracy idealists, and a testament to bearing suffering.The pursuit of religious sentiment or religiously sacred, supreme spiritual values inherent in hunger strikes is an essential part of human nature. The individual freedoms, personal sovereignty, popular sovereignty, and liberal democratic systems we revere inherently embody an idealism rooted in humanitarianism and natural law. When this generation confronts the high-pressure tactics of a totalitarian system with an exceptionally brutal and tyrannical record, and when political phobia pervades society, it is especially crucial that we employ various effective means to powerfully, yet measuredly and prudently, awaken the latent pursuit of idealistic spiritual values within each of us. Leveraging the powerful inner strength thus ignited, we can help people heal from the unnatural, unhealthy, and fundamentally inhuman political phobia that signifies the atrophy of the subject. This leads to the normal defense of personal freedom and the assertive exercise of individual political sovereignty and rights. All this can coexist without contradiction with principled, reasonable self-interest. The democratic movement does not oppose desire, utilitarianism, or worldliness. These vital impulses should be embraced and accommodated, yet they must be regulated and harnessed by spiritual strength. The democratic movement is a movement of humanity, a movement of morality, and a movement of ideals. It inspires both awakened citizens and those on the path to awakening to confront the infinitely precious

spiritual value inherent in every individual, manifesting the self-awareness and moral responsibility commensurate with the ideals of freedom and democracy. This is the profound humanistic motivation behind my consistent advocacy in various settings for self-awareness, for popular sovereignty and individual political sovereignty, and for the dignified exercise of citizens' political rights. As for my personal hunger strikes, they represent a highly introspective form of self-motivation and self-witnessing—one of the lessons I learned while imprisoned. Each act of ascetic suffering brought a certain purification to my soul. I cherish this personal experience, resonant with the ideals of freedom and democracy.

In response to the endless interrogations by police and secret police, I maintained a policy of zero confession. The interrogators repeatedly subjected me to brutal beatings and torture precisely because of my silence and refusal to yield. While administering electric shocks to my head, hands, calves, thighs, and genitals, the torturers screamed viciously: You refused probation and insisted on prison, making the Communist Party look bad! Let's see who's tougher—you or us!" They tortured and pressured me almost madly, forcing me to confess in court that opposing the Communist Party was wrong, to voluntarily abandon promoting democracy in exchange for probation, and then accept arrangements to return to teaching at the university. They sought to achieve their strategic goal of discrediting the rights defense movement and undermining public resolve by forcing several so-called "standard-bearers" to accept suspended sentences. In 2007, even the act of going to prison with dignity and conviction for advancing democracy proved extraordinarily difficult—something future generations may struggle to comprehend. I endured thirteen days and nights of sleep-deprived interrogation in a relentless interrogation marathon. For forty-two days, I was shackled to a bed frame with my hands and feet pierced by iron spikes. I suffered countless instances of verbal abuse, beatings, and hair-pulling torture. In this real-life ordeal—not a movie plot—my tormentors concentrated high-voltage electric batons on my lower body to administer electric shocks. To preserve my eternal dignity and male integrity, I had no choice but to confess to the "illegal business operations" charge—a charge lacking any legal evidence—allowing the torturers to achieve their goal and cease their assault. By this narrow escape, I avoided the tragic fate of fellow

detainees like Cang, whose lower bodies were electrocuted into charred black masses. In the early hours of that day, overcome by grief and fury, I threw myself violently against glass and walls in a desperate act of defiance. Again, by sheer luck, I neither died nor was crippled! Yet after the Spring Festival, the electric shocks returned. Under any circumstance, any coercion, any torment, I held firm to two principles: I would never abandon my ideals of freedom and democracy, and I would never betray or incriminate others. This is why my interrogators repeatedly praised my character and eventually showed restraint. Facing an unforeseen ordeal in peacetime, I upheld the life creed I had cherished since childhood and preserved the eternal purity of my soul. At any moment, I could smile and tell others—and myself—that my actions in the depths of despair were worthy of the title "human being." I faced heaven without shame and stood before others without guilt. That alone is enough for this life!

It is said: "To die bravely is easy; to die with dignity is hard." In truth, dying with dignity is not the ultimate challenge. Close your eyes, and while the body perishes, the spirit endures. But enduring the relentless physical and mental torment inflicted by a ruthless tyrant—a torment that leaves you unable to live or die—at that very moment, might preserving the purity of one's heart prove harder than dying with dignity? My personal choice is certainly not a benchmark for moral integrity. I deeply admire those who temporarily compromise under extreme pressure, only to return to righteousness like Guan Yu and reclaim their dignity. Even collapsing under such pressure, though not ideal, is not a grave evil. My own painful experience has taught me greater tolerance and understanding of human nature. A widespread atmosphere of tolerance and understanding aids victims in restoring their mental health and reclaiming their dignity. What truly deserves contempt is the despicable, barbaric regression of totalitarianism. They do not honor their opponents' dignity as ancient righteousness demanded, allowing them to endure imprisonment or death with dignity. Instead, they revel in humiliating and trampling upon their opponents' human dignity. I believe that throughout the ages, humanity will never cease to despise such spiritual baseness. Throughout the ages, humanity will never cease to despise totalitarianism—that system which openly denies the universality of humanity and justice, and brazenly employs

sophisticated philosophy to rationalize, justify, and glorify the brutality, violence, and bestial tyranny of its rule.

In 2007, being imprisoned "normally," honorably, and smoothly for freedom and democracy was a goal that required immense, agonizing sacrifice even after arrest. In 2007, enduring hardships while holding firm to my principles forced the stability maintenance apparatus to abandon its fantasy of compelling me to confess in court and accept probation. I was sentenced to five years and then went to prison with dignity. My imprisonment and choice directly thwarted the strategic plans of the post-totalitarian stability maintenance apparatus. My role may have been minor, but like a tiny fishbone lodged in its throat, it jammed the system. Subsequently, Hu Jia braved the backlash, Gao Zhisheng staged another act of moral defiance that pierced the heavens, and Zhang Zuhua and Liu Xiaobo mobilized the intellectual community to speak collectively. Hu Jia and Liu Xiaobo received international awards, and the Jasmine Revolution blossomed across the country. The multi-centered, networked structure of China's political opposition movement was thus fully forged. The extraordinary situation of "the more it is suppressed, the higher the tide rises" thrilled the people and terrified the powerful. Returning to 2007, within the butterfly effect that stirred the storm and ignited the subsequent years of escalating democratic movements, among the wings of those butterflies fluttering above the earth, surely one pair belonged to me? Seven years later, amidst this wave of suppression, beyond figures like Mr. Wang Gongquan—the "conscience of the business world"—and the "Three Heroes of Chibi" Huang Wenxun, Yuan Xiaohua, and Yuan Fengchu, imprisonment has become a far less elusive target. Over a dozen democracy activists have now been sentenced, their trials proceeding smoothly and without incident. The grotesque, bizarre physical and mental torment of forced "confessions" and "suspended sentences" is waning. Though dark clouds still swirl, the iron-cast hearts of the powerful now harbor a hint of shame, shying away from bestial cruelty. Among people, the moral value of embracing imprisonment, responsibility, and suffering to advance freedom and democracy shines brightly as an honor. The era we have long hoped for and yearned for—where a generation of freedom-loving, democratic idealists rises in conscience, takes charge of their destiny, and wave after wave moves toward

direct action to "fill the prisons"—is drawing ever closer. Before this awakened generation of citizens—this rising sovereign populace—totalitarianism will not merely be exposed, but utterly disgraced. Its inevitable collapse, its melting like ice and snow, is an outcome no tyrannical force can prevent. For brutality can never suppress humanity's growth and expansion. It will not only encounter resistance everywhere in the world, but also violate the purpose and rules of its own vessel—humanity itself. Thus, sooner or later, it will inevitably self-destruct and pack its bags, leaving the pages of history.

Throughout my turbulent life of publicly challenging totalitarianism and enduring repeated arrests and imprisonment, my wife and children have borne the heaviest burden. On March 10, 2006, as Taishi Village residents were voting for People's Congress representatives, my wife left early to buy groceries, only to be blocked by female agents on the street. Furious, she returned home to tell me. When I went downstairs to confront the agents, I was ambushed by agents lying in wait and beaten until my face was covered in blood. Once, when I took my ten-year-old daughter and five-year-old son to buy books at the West Gate of Sun Yat-sen University, several agents took turns approaching us on the bus, brazenly photographing and filming my children's faces. The entire bus fell silent with fear, unsure what was happening. As my daughter grew older, she too learned to fear. Once, when our family of four went as usual to exercise at the outdoor fitness equipment area of the Sports Center, six or seven agents followed closely behind us, shouting something loudly in Cantonese. My daughter kept turning her head to look, her face filled with terror. She whispered accusingly to me, "Daddy, it's all your fault! It's all your fault!"I was too pained to speak. For eight years, this scene has often replayed in my mind. In the spring of 2007, during my interrogation by Guangdong State Security, they threatened me: if I refused to plead guilty and accept probation, insisting instead on serving prison time, my son would be barred from elementary school, my daughter would be assigned to a distant middle school, and when she reached high school age, the computerized placement system would send her to a rural secondary school, effectively preventing her from attending university. I fully believed their threats.I knew the modus operandi and track record of this secret police agency. While not yet detained, I had staged a hunger strike

outside the State Council compound in Zhongnanhai on February 8, 2006. My demands included lifting the physical threats against my children, protesting the Shantou police shooting of several innocent farmers defending their land, and defending the press freedom of the Bingtian Weekly in China Youth Daily.But in captivity, I could do nothing. In mid-November 2007, I was sentenced to five years at Tianhe District Court. Before leaving, I turned to my wife in the gallery and asked, "Did our son go to school?" She replied, "No, they wouldn't let him." Back in my cell at Guangzhou No. 3 Detention Center that night, I tossed and turned, barely sleeping.Several days later, a fellow inmate—a convicted economic offender in his fifties—suddenly asked me: "Old Yang, how did your hair turn white all of a sudden?" I found it hard to believe. With no mirror in the cell, I had to ask several other detainees to look at me. They all agreed. Only then did I realize: the story of Wu Zixu crossing the Zhao Pass—his hair turning white overnight—had happened to me. I once told that fifty-something economic prisoner about my son being barred from school. He shook his head at first: "What era is this? How could such a thing still happen?!" I recounted the details and explained each point. Based on his longstanding trust in my character, he finally accepted the truth. This man, who had suffered oppression in the 1960s because his family had been labeled landlords, suddenly crouched down, covered his face with both hands, and began to sob silently. They wouldn't let my son study, and I didn't cry—but he did. I didn't cry, yet my heart bled constantly. Over the next year, a voice kept warning me: This can't go on. I can't let my children's futures be ruined like this. I must act.This is why, at the end of 2008, through the visiting window at Meizhou Prison, I proposed to my wife that she and our two children find a way to leave the country: to send our children to a free nation where their right to education would not be undermined or obstructed, where they could study without worry. This was the choice parents had no choice but to make under the circumstances. With the help of the chivalrous Ms. Wang and others, my wife, daughter, and son made their way to Thailand, where they stayed for several months. However, they unexpectedly encountered visa complications. Then, several strange individuals from China suddenly checked into their hotel, and my wife and children narrowly avoided a mysterious car accident while out.At this critical juncture, the revered Pastor

Fu Xiqiu and another noble, compassionate British Christian woman took immense personal risks to guide my wife and children to the United States. There, they found acceptance and assistance from the humane American government and people. The challenge of my child's schooling was thus resolved. To Pastor Fu, the British Christian woman, the chivalrous Ms. Wang, and others who risked their personal safety to rescue my family in peril; to the humane American government and people; to the great Christian church and noble Christians—my heart holds profound and enduring gratitude that I shall never forget. Their righteous deeds allowed me to directly and profoundly experience the universality, selflessness, and nobility of human love, and to feel the broad and upright spirit of a free and democratic culture. This was also a baptism and elevation for my soul.

After my release on September 13, 2011, I reconnected with my wife and children online. When I read my daughter's animated account of her overseas adventures—her passivity, her confusion, her struggle to adapt, and her longing for childhood friends back home—tears flowed like a cool, gentle stream, intermittently streaming down my face for three days. As a man, I had never shed a single tear in prison—not for my children, nor for anything else. My daughter asked triumphantly, "Did you cry after reading it?" I replied, "I cried a lot." But she was no longer the little girl who always wanted to be carried. She had grown tall, and her personality had become proud and rebellious. She insisted on making her own decisions about everything, and the distance between us seemed to grow ever wider. She harbors a quiet resentment over the years of neglected affection and responsibility since I openly challenged the regime eighteen years ago. She often responds with sarcasm and rarely calls me "Dad" anymore. A dull ache gnaws at my heart, yet I feel helpless and lost. Thinking of my daughter and son, endless guilt always floods my heart. Months ago, on July 4, 2014, at the visiting window of Tianhe District Detention Center, lawyer Zhang Xuezhong told me that last October, my daughter had drawn a portrait of me. It was said to be quite lifelike, depicting me against a mountain backdrop, with the words "High Mountains to Admire" written on the painting. This drawing was once displayed in a solemn hall to appeal for my rescue. Though I know I am not worthy of such expectations, I read a deeper meaning between the lines and within the strokes. This meaning illuminated my

vision, piercing through thick walls to shine directly into the sky: Dear daughter, in this extraordinary circumstance, I have once again earned your public expression of love for me!

After my release in 2011, witnessing the flourishing and clustering of freedom forces across the nation filled me with indescribable excitement. As an idealist, advancing the democratic movement became my inevitable choice—more resolute, steadier, and broader than ever before. In this new phase of openly exercising our civic political rights, I joined forces with fellow activists in Guangdong's civil society to dig in our heels, fight relentlessly, and engage in frequent direct actions. Seizing the historic opportunity presented by the Southern Weekly incident, we successfully conducted an orderly, rational, restrained, and peaceful political assembly experiment. We skillfully leveraged our pioneering breakthrough in street politics to build momentum and accelerate the nationwide surge of the democracy movement. The signature campaign demanding the National People's Congress ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, along with the "Eight-City Flash Mob" street advocacy, marked the initial experiments in our social movement to "abolish bad laws and amend good ones." These efforts also represented a crucial endeavor to elevate the direct actions of awakened citizens into a sovereign practice of civil society imbued with universal values and substantial weight. It comes as no surprise that the post-totalitarian stability maintenance apparatus, relying on its repressive inertia, has framed these two political experiments as my two major crimes of "gathering crowds to disrupt public order." As the ancient saying goes: "To bargain with a tiger for its skin is to court disaster." Yet liberal democratic constitutionalism must confront totalitarianism head-on—we must use the power of truth to force this "human-tiger hybrid" to shed its skin and fangs, return to humanity, relinquish its usurped power, and restore our sovereignty.

My impending sentencing falls squarely within this inertia of political persecution. To defend the freedom of speech for all Chinese people—including the editors and journalists of Southern Weekly—and to pressure the government into ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, I truly feel profoundly honored to be imprisoned. This spring dawned with gentle breezes and bright sunshine. By summer, the

winds had gathered. The successive sentencing and imprisonment of myself and dozens of fellow democracy fighters nationwide not only contribute to the broader cause of counterbalancing power, awakening more citizens, and mobilizing them for the democratic movement, but also offer me personal solace and peace of mind. Regardless of the length of my sentence, upon release, my first choice will remain direct action to advance the cause of constitutional democracy.

For idealists of freedom and democracy, action is imperative. Only through action can we bear witness to history: we have not yielded to the brutality of totalitarian politics, nor abandoned human dignity, nor relinquished the inviolable purity within our hearts. The slaughter of innocents and the enslavement of humanity are unacceptable. We will never compromise with those who wield high-pressure and violent rule. The foremost—and indeed the greatest—punishment we can inflict upon totalitarianism is to expose its anti-human, unjust nature according to the fundamental principles of humanity and justice, thereby utterly rejecting it on moral grounds. We firmly believe that future generations will make the same choice by the same standards. Strength may vary, but the weaker forces of freedom and democracy must persistently mount peaceful resistance against the mightier forces of totalitarianism—even if we become Sisyphus pushing his boulder, Prometheus stealing fire, Kua Fu chasing the sun, or the foolish old man moving mountains. Bearing witness to an unyielding spirit is the foremost purpose of our political opposition.

For idealists of liberty and democracy, action is imperative. Only through action can we escape the political terror imposed by totalitarianism through violence and lies, and reclaim our natural, healthy, free, and sovereign humanity. Amidst the relentless evolution of totalitarianism, the people remain entrenched in widespread, persistent political fear. This is profoundly abnormal—a psychological pathology afflicting the populace. Contemporary advocates for constitutional democracy in China must find effective methods to heal psychological wounds—both for themselves and for the populace. This requires, first and foremost, championing the idealistic nature of liberal democratic values. Such ideals must awaken and elevate citizens' reverence for personal dignity, liberty, rights, and sovereignty, dispelling the fog of passive submission and excessive fear imposed by

totalitarianism upon the soul. This will further foster a generation of awakened citizens with a sense of self-awareness, inspiring them to shoulder the responsibility of moral freedom. They will act to safeguard individual liberties and advance the core interests of the Chinese nation—the cause of constitutional democracy. Action is the best enlightenment; action is the objective testament to self-awareness. Action—and the even more resolute, sustained action that follows its consequences—is not only the sole path for individual citizens toward a rebellion of conscience, the affirmation of dignity, and the elevation of the soul. It is also the only way for the people to break free from the social-psychological pathology of political fear, achieve self-redemption, and make a civilizational leap.

For idealists of liberty and democracy, action is imperative. Only through action can we prevent the people from falling into the trap of believing their destiny is unattainable due to a lack of concrete examples, and only through action can we stop monopolistic, exclusionary power groups from continuing to enslave the people in various guises during this era of transformation. Throughout humanity's long history of barbarism, as humanitarian civilization has evolved, the culture of violent authoritarianism has continually absorbed new resources and transformed its form. The future of China faces not only the contest between totalitarianism and liberal democracy, but also, after the collapse of totalitarianism, the potential contest between Lee Kuan Yew-Putin-style unitary "birdcage politics" and pluralistic, balanced constitutional democracy. For advocates of China's constitutional democracy to dissolve totalitarianism, achieve a peaceful transition, and prevent Singapore-Russia-style strongman politics—with its limited scope and capacity—from sowing seeds of stagnation and instability in China's future, they must undertake resolute and intelligent united actions for freedom. They must amplify and strengthen the autonomous power of the people as the principal force, counterbalance political power with a robust civil society, and constructively and strategically regulate the ruling power through mature political opposition forces. Ultimately, this path must lead to the separation of powers and the normal rotation of power in an era of universal suffrage. Only then can political transformation proceed in the direction most aligned with the demands of popular sovereignty and most beneficial to the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation: using a

revolution in the political system to overcome its degeneration. China needs an opposition party—this has become a widespread consensus and a powerful call within Chinese society. The Chinese democracy movement bears the historic mission of establishing on this land a modern political opposition party that is free, civilized, powerful, and possesses both deep mobilizing capacity and comprehensive oversight, structured in a flat hierarchy. To establish such a political opposition party, we must act with a profound sense of responsibility, combining wisdom and courage. We must act decisively, purely, and transparently, as much as possible, by achieving roundtable consensus, amending laws, reforming institutions, or winning the overwhelming sympathy and multidimensional participation of the people. We must bear all misfortunes that may arise from this endeavor.

As a veteran who has fused life with the cause of freedom and democracy, reflecting on nearly three decades of struggle, I genuinely feel that our explorations and sacrifices for China's political opposition movement have not been in vain. The path beneath our feet grows ever wider, while the sky of ideals within our hearts expands ever more vast and luminous. To have the opportunity to participate in the arduous historical process of the rise of free democratic forces; to shoulder a mission of shaping momentum and charging into the fray, repeatedly serving as one of those who bear the burden of suffering against the current; and through this suffering to glimpse or experience certain idealistic, tragic-aesthetic, or religiously sacred elements within the human spirit—this is the supreme fortune of my ordinary life. In the reverie of freedom, this reminds me of the profound meaning behind the ancient Chinese creation of the character "人" (ren), which depicts a person standing with feet on the earth and head reaching toward the sky.

Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)

November 29, 2014

The future holds profound historical significance

— Court Defense Statement

The time has come. Once again, I stand before this courtroom. This courtroom is truly extraordinary. It is a courtroom of special depth, a microcosm of a particular facet of contemporary Chinese political and legal life. From one perspective, I see the totalitarian stability-maintenance machine that views constitutional democracy as an abyss—its gears, its hinges, the entanglement and clash between good laws and bad laws, humanity not yet extinguished or humanity about to be extinguished. From another perspective, I see the eternal natural law, the eternal heavens, and the eternal history stirring waves in our pure spiritual world.

In this courtroom, I shall recount in my own narrative style the truth of my participation in street protests and political assemblies in solidarity with Southern Weekly. I will detail my original intent, core considerations, operational methods, actions, and balancing tactics; I will explain the fundamental rationale and legal facts underlying my promotion of the "Eight-City Flash Mob" street campaign urging the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

My account follows an inherent, profound, and coherent logical thread. I ask all my friends to listen patiently. With the facts before you, you will naturally be able to form your own judgments.

I. The Origin

One day in the summer of 1999, a friend from Henan called me. He said a child from a poor family in his village had been struck in the temple by a teacher—the son of the village chief—and died on the spot. China's farmers, long trapped at the bottom of the authoritarian pyramid, find existing legal channels virtually closed to them when facing abuse by the powerful. The child's parents, with nowhere else to turn, sought a newspaper with a conscience to expose the incident. My friend asked for my help. I contacted a renowned reporter at Southern Weekly, who replied: "Send us the relevant

text and photos by express delivery. Once we verify their authenticity, we will send a reporter to cover the story." I relayed this message immediately. However, a week later, news came that the child's mother had been pressured into accepting a "private settlement" under intense pressure. Though the outcome was infuriating and disheartening, this experience made me realize: when marginalized groups face human rights crises, Southern Weekly remains a source of hope and support. For over two decades, we have read countless reports in this newspaper—one with both courage and compassion—exposing the dark crimes of power trampling on human rights, upholding justice, and advocating for the rule of law.

In August 2000, Southern Weekly featured on its front page a report about Li Changping, Party Secretary of Qipan Township in Jianli County, Hubei Province, who petitioned Premier Zhu Rongji to address the "Three Rural Issues Crisis." This made the "Three Rural Issues" a crucial lens for examining China's social crises. The situation directly stirred deep-seated concerns within me—as the son of farmers—about the land and its nurturing essence. Later, I became friends with Mr. Li Changping and sought his counsel on multiple occasions. Integrating my experience in southern markets with liberal political ideals, a practical approach to resolving the "three rural issues" through free markets, human rights, and the rule of law, social security, and grassroots democratic self-governance gradually took shape in my mind. This became the intellectual foundation for my involvement in farmers' rights struggles across numerous villages in various regions. Many readers who cherish liberal and human rights values have shared similar experiences. Countless strands of free-thinking can be traced back to articles in Southern Weekly. This newspaper, blending the fresh air of the sea with the earthy scent of the Central Plains, offered new information and ideas that became seeds planted in the collective psyche of a generation.

Under intense state control, Southern Weekly managed to carve out a limited yet vibrant sanctuary of free speech from the cracks—a veritable miracle. This miracle was sustained by sister publications within the Southern Media Group. Operating in tacit solidarity, they broke through censorship and falsehoods with truthful reporting, bearing witness to China's enduring sense of justice and conscience. In spring 2003, the brutal beating death of Hubei student Sun Zhigang in a Guangzhou detention center was

exposed by Southern Metropolis Daily, sparking nationwide outrage. Under public pressure, the Hu-Wen administration repealed the State Council's Regulations on Detention and Investigation. The human rights improvements that followed the demise of this draconian law were profound for migrant workers and other mobile populations who had endured years of being searched, expelled, beaten, and detained like livestock—a reality unimaginable to those who hadn't lived it. From July to September 2005, I participated in the recall of village officials in Taishi Village, Panyu, Guangzhou. This was a constitutionally significant democratic experiment conducted through legal procedures. As soon as the incident began, Southern Rural News broke the story with the headline "Democracy on the Sand Pile." Soon after, Southern Metropolis Daily followed up with on-site coverage of the confirmation of the recall motion. The efforts of these conscientious media outlets enabled the protesting farmers to avoid the fate of being subjected to the "black-box operations" of the bureaucratic establishment. I witnessed firsthand the farmers' gratitude, which was evident in their expressions.

Countless examples demonstrate that Southern Weekly and its sister publication Southern Metropolis Daily, through their work and commitment, have stood as bastions of freedom and voices of the people in mainland China, earning the trust of civil society. Precisely for this reason, in early January 2013, when Southern Weekly's article "The Chinese Dream, The Constitutional Dream" was censored by Tuo Zhen, head of the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee's Propaganda Department, severely violating its right to freely express views on public affairs, China's online public sphere and civil society reacted strongly. Throughout January 7, thousands of citizens gathered outside the gates of Southern Media Group to support the brave editors and journalists of Southern Weekly and protest the dictatorship's illegal suppression. People expressed their fundamental sense of conscience and justice, along with their disgust and hatred for totalitarian ideological confinement. This also represented the free forces, having benefited from free media, and gave back and protected that very freedom.

To be clear, the gathering of thousands of citizens on the streets outside the Southern Media Group headquarters during the cold winter months was not something any individual could have instigated or incited. From January

4th to 6th, the wave of support for Southern Weekly on major microblog platforms like Sina, Sohu, and Tencent reached a near-boiling, explosive intensity, fully demonstrating the formation and grandeur of the free-thinking camp and civil society in mainland China. The courageous resistance of Southern Weekly's journalists ignited the hearts of a generation striving for freedom and opposing totalitarianism, transforming the stirrings of words into direct action on the ground—a natural progression. Personally, I sincerely wish I could have rallied thousands to take to the streets for democracy in this high-pressure era, but I cannot claim credit for what was not mine to achieve.

My contribution lies on another level.

As early as 2012, when environmental rights defense incidents erupted in Shifang and Ningbo, I paid close attention, pondering whether we could channel spontaneous public protests—with their case-specific, localized demands—toward a political experiment in Guangzhou. This experiment would guide people toward bolder, more proactive expressions of universal demands, striving for widespread freedom and democratic rights while exercising citizens' political rights in an orderly manner. Such a political experiment would exclude riots, resentment, and disruptive forces. Through the self-regulation and self-restraint of civil society, it would forge a peaceful, rational, controllable, and constructive model of street politics. This would create a path for China's society to forge a non-adversarial, orderly political opening and the decisive growth of civil society, leading to the comprehensive establishment of a free, democratic constitutional system.

Therefore, within hours of the first signed protest by Southern Weekly journalists appearing on Sina Weibo on the evening of January 4, I made a prediction about the situation and subsequently activated the "political experiment" switch in my mind. Through the dispersed or concentrated efforts of Guangzhou's civic society members, including myself, the citizen gathering outside Southern Media's gates evolved from sympathizing with and supporting the individual demands of Southern Weekly staff into a comprehensive civic political appeal. The political banners prominently displaying "Press Freedom, Constitutional Democracy," along with formal political speeches and communications delivered by freedom and democracy activists, became the focal point of the crowd's activities. These two elements

transformed the street solidarity for the Southern Weekly incident into a genuine, thematically distinct political assembly. It was widely recognized by public opinion as the first such event since 1989, continuing and extending the great tradition of direct action for freedom and democracy onto a new platform and at a new historical juncture.

Do not mistake us freedom fighters for those who use solidarity with Southern Weekly and defense of free speech as a pretext to stir unrest, seize power, or even overthrow the regime. Such assumptions project the mindset of authoritarian totalitarians onto democrats and grossly underestimate the ambitions of activists who have fused their lives with the cause of liberty and democracy. We shall forge ahead with the courage of warriors charging into battle, bearing the weight of our bodies. By pooling the strength of the masses and drawing on the wisdom of past and present, we will shape and control the broader landscape. We aim to establish a social framework in which the power of the people is fully balanced with that of the state, creating a mature constitutional democracy for China and humanity. Our personal goal is to realize an ideal system, not fleeting personal power that fades within years. Freedom remains our unyielding pursuit. To live thus—is this not the greatest joy?

Through our public actions and demonstrations, we have unequivocally declared: our political gatherings safeguard China's conscience and serve as the voice of its people. We fight not only for the freedom of speech of the editors and journalists of Southern Weekly, but for all Chinese citizens. We battle for a universal political right. Our immediate emotions—our guardianship and our anger—are genuine. Our idealistic declaration—freedom of speech and its institutional safeguards of constitutional democracy—is equally genuine. For we have awakened, deeply recognizing that humanity possesses a dignity distinct from animals. We ought to break free from the animal-like state of silence, passivity, and enslaved subjecthood, and claim the right to a public spiritual life and public political life.

The essence of freedom of speech is the right of a nation's citizens to express themselves on public or non-public affairs. Citizens who enjoy freedom of speech create, through public media, a spiritual public space where they interact and exchange ideas. Thus, the right to freedom of speech

is humanity's entitlement to a public spiritual life befitting human dignity and communal nature—a life distinct from the silence of animals. It is the first ray of popular sovereignty cast upon the earth, the collective voice of the sovereign people, and the public platform for individual citizens possessing personal political sovereignty. Other vital political rights—such as freedom of assembly, demonstration, and association—all require freedom of speech as their indispensable foundation. Under free speech, diverse schools of thought and competing interests engage in civil, rational competition and negotiation, fostering healthier, more balanced public life. When public sentiment and popular will converge, free speech amplifies and multiplies the people's power. Thus, it is regarded as one of the most fundamental human and political rights.

Fighting for freedom of speech for all Chinese people, including those at Southern Weekly, was the primary purpose of the participants in the three-day political gathering outside the Southern Media Group headquarters. Our affirmation and promotion of this great cause demonstrate our sincere sense of justice, our open-hearted humanity, and our profound and broad understanding of the ideals of freedom and democracy.

As for myself, I can state unequivocally that my participation in all activities supporting the Southern Weekly incident has a second, equally profound political intent beyond the primary goal of "defending freedom of speech for all Chinese people, including Southern Weekly staff": By politicizing the street gathering outside the Southern Media Group's gates and creating a fait accompli of political assembly, we gradually transformed citizens' political rights on paper into tangible rights on the ground. This, in turn, promoted the normalization of exercising citizens' political rights, laid the groundwork for public opinion, and established norms for action toward future political openness.

These two objectives formed the core considerations of my personal political experiment conducted through the street protests supporting Southern Weekly. All my operations and actions from January 4th to 9th were grounded in these two principles.

Seizing major historical opportunities to conduct political experiments on the platform of individual cases, mobilize public support, and advance the process of political liberalization and democratization is not a personal whim

but a primary political strategy of our rights defense movement. It is grounded in a comprehensive reflection on China's democratic movement and a deep understanding of shifts in China's social structure and public sentiment.

Following the failure of the sweeping 1989 student movement, waves of democratic pioneers in 1991, 1993, and 1998 courageously challenged the ban on political parties by exercising citizens' right to freedom of association. Yet, due to the post-totalitarian system's strict suppression and brutal crackdowns, these efforts failed to generate widespread social impact. While these pioneers' feats bequeathed immense spiritual wealth to the democracy movement, new grassroots forces were simultaneously taking root deep within society. In the mid-to-late 1990s, liberal political theories entered China, granting its people their first glimpse into the essence of Western political civilization. Nourished by these ideas, the freedom-oriented intellectual class largely completed its constitutional democratic enlightenment. The transition from books to action was imminent. At this juncture, the internet provided civilization with a low-cost, high-impact tool for disseminating information, gathering ideas, and coordinating actions. As the social foundation, long-term economic development had cultivated the personal capabilities, operational space, and independent self-awareness of hundreds of millions of people. This further facilitated the widespread awakening of rights consciousness among an entire generation.

Against this backdrop of large-scale, macro-level causality, in early 2003, the Sun Zhigang incident sparked a rare nationwide mobilization across all strata of Chinese society, giving rise to the rights defense movement.

In its early stages, the rights defense movement primarily focused on legal advocacy for individual cases—especially those involving political persecution—and social mobilization. Key figures included Dr. Xu Zhiyong and lawyer Mo Shaoping.

In January 2005, a new generation of activists emerging from Mr. Zhao Ziyang's funeral ceremony, deeply moved by the stirring atmosphere at Babaoshan Cemetery, resolved to elevate the democratic movement. Within six months, an unprecedented convergence of political, legal, and ideological forces emerged, propelling the rights defense movement into its second

phase—the beginning of its formal naming and crystallization. Objectively speaking, as participants who simultaneously mourned, planned, and acted, Fan Yafeng and I were the earliest definers of the rights defense movement—the original architects of its core concepts, political ideology, and operational strategies. Lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who joined months later, became one of the main pillars of courtroom struggles at that time.

Dr. Fan Yafeng pioneered the introduction of Taiwan's Formosa Incident model of collective legal representation in mainland China, establishing the defense team for Cai Zhuohua's illegal Bible printing case in July 2005, with Gao Zhisheng serving as lead counsel. While articulating the ideological significance of this case, I became the first to explicitly advocate for the grand theme of "defending religious freedom" in online public discourse and globalized the case's information disclosure efforts. Prior to this, disseminating information to foreign media was widely feared as a minefield. Many foundational collective rights defense techniques and strategies converged during this period. In late July, the Taishi Village campaign to recall village officials erupted in Panyu District, Guangzhou. I served as the villagers' legal counsel, and their earlier economic protests escalated into a political rights defense struggle. When the District Civil Affairs Bureau violated provisions of the Village Committee Organization Law by refusing to approve the recall motion, villagers launched a relay hunger strike. Guangzhou's democracy activists, university professors, lawyers, businesspeople, Southern Media Group newspapers, three major television stations, and international media successively intervened. Core rights defenders in Beijing and elsewhere provided step-by-step support, forming a structural and contextual foundation. This marked the first political experiment proactively initiated by the rights defense movement, with "defending the democratic right to election under the law" emerging as its grand political theme. The villagers exercised their political rights to assemble, march, and demonstrate to ensure that the written law's prescribed recall procedures and judicial remedies were not arbitrarily shut down by the bureaucratic establishment. This operational model—advancing democratic elections through legal struggle as its core means—endowed Taishi Village's democratic experiment with constitutional significance and earned it widespread societal sympathy and multidimensional engagement. By this

point, the political ideology and operational strategy of the rights defense movement had taken initial shape. Its essence can be summarized as follows:

1. Mobilize free democratic activists, intellectuals, lawyers and legal professionals, grassroots leaders and grassroots resisters, journalists, writers, etc., to form action-oriented political, legal, and ideological clusters anchored in specific legal cases or political events. Within this cluster, there are no hierarchical command structures. It operates as a multi-centered, loosely organized, flat structure, relying on shared values and goals, civic consciousness, ethical rules, reputation, and trust to coordinate action and foster self-development. Its anti-authoritarian, individual-freedom-centered contractual relationships are seen as an exploration or rehearsal for the mechanisms of civil political organization in a future free and democratic society.

2. The legalization of political events and the politicization of legal forces enable legitimate struggles grounded in natural law and sound legislation to dominate public intellectual life. By pooling resources and advancing protections of political rights, they propel democratic movements. Leveraging collective strength, these groups operate within the neutral legal procedures and judicial remedies—rights existing on paper—that even rulers ostensibly endorse. This approach minimizes action risks, lowers costs, and broadens societal participation. Through case-based rights defense, political experiments, and targeted social operations, it fearlessly champions "grand political themes." Leveraging internet acceleration and viral public discourse, it enlightens and mobilizes marginalized grassroots communities and free-thinking individuals across sectors to join the civic society of activists. This defends and expands individual and political rights, thereby amplifying the prestige and political strength of China's democratic movement.

The rights defense movement represents a new phase in China's democratic struggle following the challenge to party prohibitions. From its very inception and collective emergence, it has centered constitutional democracy as its core ideology and ultimate objective. "Engaging in politics" constitutes our original intent, essential nature, and fundamental character.Totalitarianism strives to instill fear of politics among the populace through brutal suppression and divide-and-rule tactics. Our vital mission is

to genuinely and incrementally help all social strata overcome this fear and feigned apathy by practicing and promoting citizens' political rights, alongside effective, feasible, and sustained collective mobilization. This restores citizens' inherent consciousness and the natural exercise of political rights. Through the integrated application of methods—including flat-structure invisible organization with visible coordination, legalization of political events, open expansion within neutral legal boundaries, targeted case management and political experimentation, and benevolent enlightenment of the ruling elite—the rights defense movement successfully dismantled the historical challenge of pervasive political fear and apathy following June Fourth. It preliminarily addressed the strategic need for the democracy movement to mobilize society in multidimensional depth. Over the past decade, the social foundation of the democracy movement has undergone a quantum leap. Free and democratic activists and thinkers have returned from forced marginalization to the mainstream of civil society's public intellectual life. The robust foundation and multi-centered network structure of the freedom camp have enabled the rights defense movement to repeatedly withstand relentless suppression by the superpower and even gain momentum through such challenges. In this regard, the rights defense movement stands as one of history's most resilient political forces. In a sense, the rights defense movement may contain some truth and has significant potential to achieve major historical innovation on the path toward constitutional democracy in China.

3. The rights defense movement has successfully forged a political alliance between liberalism and grassroots movements. This appears to transcend the long-standing left-right debate within academic circles, granting the democracy movement a profound social foundation and moral support. Some commentators argue that the rights defense movement emerged from grassroots economic rights protection and human rights struggles, with its mainstream demands being non-political and detached from the democracy movement. This represents a serious misunderstanding of the rights defense movement. Historical facts show that the first to emerge were powerful political rights defense movements, such as the Taishi Village democracy experiment, which shocked both domestic and international audiences. Then, through the proactive and effective linkage of the 2006

relay hunger strike movement, and with the arduous efforts of rights defense lawyers, grassroots citizens—who had previously relied mainly on petitioning to protest—were guided onto the track of legal rights defense procedures. Consequently, nearly all grassroots resistance—including non-legal forms of protest—came to be collectively labeled "rights defense activities" by public discourse. This represents both the natural broadening of the movement's name and the logical expansion of its scope. However, political rights defenders and freedom and democracy activists remain the soul and vanguard of the entire rights defense movement, its stable and indisputable mainstream. After joining hands with rights defense lawyers, grassroots protesters often merge into the mighty current of the cause for freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

4. The rights defense movement transcends adversarial zero-sum models. The democratic movement, propelled by political experimentation, social mobilization, and force consolidation, is inherently peaceful, rational, controllable, and constructive. Its political essence lies in ideological struggle: it firmly believes in the truth of universal values such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, primarily leveraging this truth to wage a "war of hearts and minds" against totalitarian forces. Through successful actions, it demonstrates the moral appeal, practical feasibility, and capacity for institutional integration of the political ideal of "freedom and democracy under the rule of law," shattering the falsehood propagated by rigid thinking that democracy will lead to hostility, division, and major upheaval. It rejects any entrenched factionalism and prevents the replication of old anti-freedom elements in the new world. Proponents of freedom and democracy must themselves engage in self-enlightenment and self-development in accordance with the rules of the social contract. As the iron walls of totalitarianism melt away under the light of universal values, those indirectly enlightened toward goodness can also share in the boundless opportunities of political openness and free competition.

5. The rights defense movement fully leveraged new technologies and interpersonal interaction methods developed by the information revolution, utilizing the connected virtual space as one of the primary platforms for civic political activities. It also steadfastly and fearlessly embraced the moral support for China's democracy movement from numerous conscientious

media outlets, governments, parliaments, peoples, and human rights organizations within the international community. Owing to the rights defense movement's intellectual foundation and creative action, various resistance forces within China's civil society achieved a grand coalition under the banner of rights defense, escalating their efforts step by step in the face of suppression. In mid-2006, Chen Guangcheng, Gao Zhisheng, and I were successively arrested and imprisoned. Hu Jia and others courageously stepped forward to resist the backlash of repression. By late 2008, veteran democracy activists like Zhang Zuhua and Liu Xiaobo launched the Charter 08 signature campaign, elevating the movement's mobilization of intellectuals to new heights. Hu Jia and Liu Xiaobo were also imprisoned but later received international awards, spreading the reputation of China's democracy movement worldwide. Within the legal community, lawyers Jiang Tianyong, Li Heping, Tang Jingling, Tang Jitian, Teng Biao, and others led a large group of new-generation lawyers to courageously intervene in numerous so-called "sensitive" major legal cases. They orchestrated the practical connection between the rights defense movement and grassroots movements. This marked the comprehensive and in-depth advancement phase of the rights defense movement, its third stage. The 2011 "Jasmine Revolution" marked its fourth phase. It centered on the exercise of citizens' political rights, such as freedom of assembly, as its vague yet primary objective and mode of action. Though the secret police apparatus's frenzied suppression halted it, the participants' heroic endurance, unwavering dedication, and the noble spirit they displayed ignited an even greater wave of civic engagement in the online public sphere. During this phase, the "Human Rights Lawyers 2.0"—a large cohort of attorneys—gained global attention for their innovations in human rights advocacy and legal techniques. This new cluster became one of the structural pillars propelling the rights defense movement forward within neutral zones.

From the nationwide online "spectatorship" of Chen Guangcheng's hometown, the Dongshigu Village in 2011 to the present, this marks the fifth phase of the rights defense movement. Centered on the public exercise of citizens' political rights, this phase revolves around initiatives like Beijing's "New Citizens Movement" and the "City-wide Dinner Gatherings" organized by civic circles in Shanghai, Changsha, Wuhan, Nanning, and

other cities. Capitalizing on the historical momentum of solidarity with the Southern Weekly incident, Guangzhou's civic society achieved a breakthrough in street politics. Inspired by the three-day peaceful political gathering outside the Southern Media Group headquarters, Beijing's civic society launched street campaigns calling on officials to disclose their assets. Subsequently, Guangzhou's civic society introduced another grand political theme, launching a citizen petition urging the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Sun Desheng and Yuan Fengchu (Yuan Bing)'s "Eight-City Flash Mob" campaign served as a series of street promotions for this grand political theme. Street politics once again stirred up a storm, triggering panic within the post-totalitarian secret police system. This was the direct cause of the recent wave of arrests targeting freedom and democracy activists.

Viewed through the lens of Chinese history, our current predicament is merely an inevitable phase in the rights defense movement's journey toward comprehensive political openness and democratization. As the influence of the freedom camp grows, professional political activists mature, and political phobia diminishes—drawing in fresh forces—the core of the rights defense movement is gradually shifting from neutral legal spaces and low-intensity political arenas toward high-stakes political domains. The leadership transition within the Chinese Communist Party at the end of 2012 highlighted some positive aspects of the limited-term system within the post-totalitarian system. Weighing the pros and cons, the probability of a non-hostile, peaceful transition in Chinese society has increased. Escalating the rights defense movement has thus become the inevitable choice for us, the practitioners of liberal democratic ideals.

In this intensified political phase of the rights defense movement, my fundamental political operational principles are:

1. Uphold the ideals of popular sovereignty and citizen agency, systematically advancing the open and active exercise of political rights including: the right to vote and stand for election; freedom of speech; the right to assemble, demonstrate, and protest; freedom of association; local and grassroots self-governance; oversight and recall rights; the right to initiate legislation; and the right to national referendums. The transition from private ownership of power to public ownership represents the greatest political

revolution in human history. In the context of constitutional democracy, individual citizens essentially share the status of supreme sovereigns, thereby being endowed by human civilization with "divinity upon earth." We must never allow compromises or trade-offs in specific political operations to obscure the idealistic and divine brilliance inherent in "popular sovereignty and individual political sovereignty under natural law." Calling for eternal humanitarian ideals and sacred human rights concepts inspires people to reflect on the precious spiritual value inherent in each individual's moral character—the very source of sovereignty and agency. From this foundation, we strive to help a generation establish personal sovereignty, a sense of agency, and an awareness of active participation. This represents the spiritual heights pursued by the human rights movement's humanitarian enlightenment mission. The best form of enlightenment is action—the social actions of citizens striving for freedom and democracy.The democratic actions propelled by the rights defense movement concretely measure the democratization process by the substantive expansion of citizens' political rights. Our core, profound operational strategy is to champion ideals, ignite the moral courage to fight for freedom and resist totalitarianism, and resolutely and orderly advance the fulfillment of these political rights under the governance of natural law and moral principles. This serves as the engine to revitalize the entire system and catalyze a political revolution.

2. Vigorously advancing the construction of civil society, helping various types of activists integrate into the open, intensive, and legal activity space of civil society, promoting comprehensive self-governance across all social strata and industries, and establishing an independent, developed civil society as the substantive foundation of the democratic movement and the fundamental means for the free association of all people. The concept of "building civil society" embodies this profound insight: the state originates from society yet transcends it. Therefore, a free society must delineate the separation of powers between the state and society, with society checking the state. One mission of the rights defense movement is to translate this political truth into the actual political and social landscape, thereby providing enduring foundational support for the future constitutional democracy. Civil society encompasses both political groups and various functional associations. Its structure resembles an ocean—diverse, flat, relatively loose,

and driven by consensus-based spontaneous order. The independence and freedom of individual elements constitute its very essence. A crucial yet exceptionally challenging step in building civil society is fostering a competitive multiparty political landscape, particularly the formation and maturation of opposition parties, which form the core of its political sector. The rights defense movement currently functions as the opposition movement in mainland China and will inevitably evolve into an opposition party. However, if we fail to mobilize and integrate the deep-seated forces within Chinese society, and if we cannot build a robust, free civil society to serve as our foundation—instead existing as a weak and isolated opposition—we will struggle to avoid a repeat of the "half-baked transition" witnessed under Putin's authoritarian rule in Russia, where the state remains strong while the people remain weak. Given this, we must dedicate ourselves in the early and middle stages of the political opposition movement to cultivating a broad and deep social foundation. Building an enduring matrix for the opposition movement—a robust and well-regulated civil society—should be a key guiding principle for our political actions. The dragon body of the freedom camp must coil through the realms of legal politics, ideological struggle, and grassroots self-governance, immersing itself deeply and enduring over time.

3. To facilitate a future peaceful transition, in the vanguard of the democratic movement—street politics—we must adopt controlled political experimentation. This approach avoids intense confrontation, minimizes negative effects, and explores paths toward orderly political opening and mutual benefit for officials and citizens. Both the excessive fears of authoritarian rulers and the people's conservative yearning for a happy life are factors we take seriously. Our political experimentation strategy aims not at street battles but at amplifying public opinion to use small events to drive larger dynamics, fostering nationwide democratic momentum. To prevent spiraling out of control and forcing officials and citizens into extreme choices, we have long been refining, testing, and combining various balancing mechanisms and tension-release strategies.

4. Effectively and transcendentally propel the broader trend of reconstructing Chinese society through legal resources, achieving comprehensive modernization of political and social rules. As a historical

swamp of human rights trampled by millennia of imperial autocracy and a major disaster zone for totalitarian utopian experiments, no era in China's history has ever witnessed such an immense thirst for the rule of law as exists today. One major achievement of the rights defense movement has been elevating the vast contingent of rights defense lawyers to pivotal positions in the historical transformation. Centered on these pioneers of the rule of law and champions of democracy, legal struggles to uphold human rights and political freedoms while advancing judicial independence are emerging as a mainstream force in China's social rule evolution.

5. The aforementioned operational approaches all adhere to an orderly political revolution model that conditionally sets aside transformation strategies beyond peaceful transition. This model inherently presupposes procedural civilization: without constitutional and legal reform, it is impossible to genuinely normalize citizens' political rights or to achieve a politically open process under a national roundtable consensus. Therefore, facilitating legislative amendments is the starting point for a multi-win package solution and one of the focal points for the current phase of democratic momentum and pressure-driven change.

Based on my fundamental political philosophy and experimental approach outlined above, my operations and actions in supporting the Southern Weekly incident can be clearly and systematically summarized and evaluated. The most crucial element in this street protest was public sympathy. The spontaneous group activities supporting Southern Weekly escalated into political assemblies demanding freedom, with three decisive threads emerging:

1. On January 6, Yuan Xiaohua displayed a sign reading "Support Southern Weekly, Defend Press Freedom" outside the Southern Media Group headquarters. Crucially, on the morning of January 7, Yuan Fengchu (Yuan Bing) raised a placard stating "Tou Po Must Go, or Guangdong Castrates Itself. Press Freedom, Constitutional Democracy." This served as a bridge from online to on-the-ground political expression. These signs clearly articulated Guangzhou's civil society's political stance, igniting the flame of freedom and democracy among the protesters. Under their influence and inspiration, people overcame their political fears, unleashed intense passion for political participation, and joined the collective efforts of

political speeches, propaganda, discussions, and solidarity protests.

2. The political speech I delivered outside the Southern Media Group headquarters at noon on January 7, immediately after urgently completing the online news release about this street protest, along with the sustained political speeches, discussions, and advocacy conducted on-site by Liu Yuandong, Yuan Fengchu (Yuan Bing), and others, played a foundational role in positioning, consolidating, and supporting the structure of the political gathering.

3. Citizens from Guangzhou's civil society—including groups formed through civic dinners, park-themed gatherings, and rights defense lawyers—spontaneously converged to become the focal point of the political assembly. They also served as the backbone force in maintaining order and preventing disruptions.

How can my role in this be specifically and comprehensively acknowledged?

I am pleased to acknowledge that, seizing this historic opportunity, I proactively and systematically—yet with characteristic Chinese subtlety—initiated street political experimentation. My predictions during January 4–6 across various platforms that the online wave of solidarity would inevitably spark on-the-ground protests objectively provided significant motivation to some Guangzhou street activists. The two pivotal placard actions by Yuan Xiaohua and Yuan Fengchu (Yuan Bing) on January 6th and 7th, though not my suggestion but their own initiative driven by democratic ideals and civic consciousness, were guided by my explicit advice when they consulted me on the wording: they should directly address the political themes of freedom of speech and constitutional democracy, making clear to the nation what we defend and pursue; My online publicity and Weibo reporting before and during the event helped build momentum for the political gathering. At critical junctures, my appearance outside the Southern Media Group headquarters to deliver political speeches served both to elevate and define our political stance, as well as to set boundaries and exercise restraint. Throughout 2012, the Southern Rights Defense Movement was exceptionally active, with street incidents occurring one after another. As a veteran of the democracy and rights defense movements with nearly 30 years of struggle experience, I devoted considerable effort to fostering the

Guangzhou civic society's style of "building strong camps and fighting tough battles," as well as to uniting groups such as civic dinners, park-themed gatherings, and rights defense lawyers. I also played a role in coordination. My fundamental approach has been to fulfill my duty and advance the broader cause. Had I not been arrested, framed with fabricated charges, and brought to trial, I would never have felt compelled to confront history, reveal my true feelings, and make such a public confession and self-assessment—actions that run counter to my nature.

In short, the gathering was not my doing. But in escalating it, I played a significant role. By igniting the flame and highlighting the theme, I helped elevate the spontaneous protest of the assembled crowd into a political assembly—fulfilling my responsibility.

Once the political gathering became a fait accompli, Guangzhou's civil society immediately faced a critical mission: ensuring that this rare political assembly proceeded in an orderly manner, setting an exemplary model nationwide for peacefulness, rationality, restraint, and standardization. This would strengthen societal consensus and pave the way for the normalization of citizens' political rights—rather than undermining it.

To ensure the orderly conduct of the political gathering outside the Southern Media Group headquarters, Guangzhou's civil society proactively implemented the following measures:

1. Accepting reasonable suggestions from on-site police officers, the group withdrew entirely from the semi-circular area outside Southern Media's gates—including the main thoroughfare—to the sidewalk corridor within the roadway. This was actually a collective, self-conscious choice made by protesters on the morning of January 7th, reflecting Guangzhou citizens' high standards, widespread awareness of rules, and spirit of tolerance, compromise, and interaction.

2. Practiced self-restraint by strictly limiting the objectives and scope of actions. While "freedom of speech and constitutional democracy" remained our overarching political theme, we confined the specific goals of street protests and political gatherings to expressing sympathy and solidarity, exerting pressure through protest, promoting our themes, and defending the editorial independence of Southern Weekly journalists. We refrained from raising demands like "If Tuo Zhen doesn't resign, we'll be here every day"

precisely because we learned from past student movements' lessons of "willpower contests" and interpersonal conflicts. To prevent escalation, we also rejected proposals to protest at the provincial party committee's gate after exchanging views.

3. We voluntarily dispersed between 5:00 and 5:30 PM daily, establishing a three-day precedent of orderly political gatherings. I played a significant proactive role in this. On the afternoon of January 7th, while on-site, I kept thinking: We must wrap up before dusk to prevent chaos or accidents. Around 5:00 PM, a police officer addressed the crowd: "It's almost quitting time. You've worked hard today—it's time to go home." I agreed this was reasonable and the right moment. Seeing hesitation among protesters, I raised my hand and signaled to civic activists present to depart together. Here, I fully leveraged my age and seniority advantage, and the crowd subsequently dispersed. Undercover police officers, seemingly interpreting this as proof I was the leader, approached and began brazenly filming my head and my occasionally raised hand. I responded with a smile. My on-the-spot decision was deeply considered, rooted in years of reflection on the 1989 student movement and the absorption of experiences from controlled assemblies, parades, and demonstrations in various countries.

4. After daily withdrawals from the site, the spontaneous dinners among protesters served as an informal coordination mechanism. We reached consensus on limited objectives, orderly actions, self-restraint, the exclusion of disruptions, and constructive expression. To preserve the overall framework, I deliberately tempered some more intense expressions. This contributed significantly to fostering a positive order and relaxed atmosphere at the protest site.

5. Participants from Guangzhou's civic society proactively maintained order at the site, promptly addressing or resolving disputes, disruptions, vandalism, and other violations of public passage or hygiene. Lawyer Zhang Shu frequently discussed with me—both in person and over the phone—how to refine public service activities, such as gently reminding attendees not to trample flowers or to use paper bags to pick up litter. When prominent anti-corruption activist Ou Bo faced physical confrontation instigated by a small pro-government group, lawyers and I swiftly stepped in to separate them, poised to physically intervene if necessary. We treated such minor incidents

with the utmost seriousness, constantly alerting and coordinating with one another.

6. A stage-like scene unfolded at the rally: a Maoist contingent of over a dozen Mao portrait-wielding individuals appeared as the opposing force to Southern Weekly supporters. Public security officers cleverly positioned them north of the Southern Media Group entrance. Yet, led by a burly young man carrying a large banner, the Maoists repeatedly charged toward the protest crowd south of the entrance. Fortunately, several veteran pro-democracy activists physically absorbed the momentum of their charges. These elders voluntarily chose to fulfill this duty, silently holding their ground—a sacrifice largely unnoticed. I repeatedly advised multiple activists: When provoked by the Maoist contingent, exercise restraint. Refrain from verbal responses. If they resort to physical disruption, immediately file complaints with on-site police and document the incident with photos. The Maoists possess the right to express opposition to Southern Weekly and its supporters. Their presence contributes to political balance and enriches the diversity of political gatherings. Indeed, no clashes occurred in the end. Regrettably, however, during the January 10th clearance operation, a pro-democracy activist discovered that one of the officers who had forcibly transported him by vehicle to the military district auditorium for temporary detention was none other than the burly young man who had carried the banner and led the charge against protesters in the Maoist contingent—revealing his dual identity.

7. When I later formally explained and promoted this political gathering online and via microblog, I offered an objective and measured assessment of the event's depth: the three-day political gathering was not dispersed midway; the public security police present acted constructively; we freedom and democracy activists were not intercepted when leaving, nor were we arrested at the scene; and during the January 10th dispersal, no one was beaten or criminally detained. Under the prevailing post-totalitarian high-pressure environment, these developments, in a sense, demonstrate a certain degree of tolerance among Guangdong's principal officials. I promptly acknowledged this and declared: Should provincial and municipal leaders advance genuine political reforms, we stand ready to support them. The signal I conveyed was this: We demonstrate goodwill through self-restraint,

share the honor of political experimentation with officials and citizens through fair evaluation, foster broader consensus through small wins, and ultimately achieve major victories through that consensus. We advance from diverse starting points toward diverse processes, structures, and outcomes. As activists and responsible actors, the messages and tone we project facilitate the formation of a healthy, positive, non-adversarial, and constructive orientation toward political participation. Street protests and political gatherings in solidarity with Southern Weekly drew high praise from visiting netizens and civil society figures nationwide: The events demonstrated Guangzhou's civic society possesses high political literacy and strong rights awareness, courageously setting a precedent for street politics across China. The citizens' collective activities were remarkably rational and restrained, with the atmosphere peaceful, harmonious, and free of hostility—even carrying a certain lightheartedness. Some passing drivers even mistook the scene for a large-scale job fair, assuming the crowd was waiting to apply for positions. Social order and traffic flow remained largely unaffected. Observers noted that the assembly's civilized and open nature aligned with Guangdong's image as a reform-leading frontier, starkly contrasting with the riots at shopping malls in Changsha and Xi'an during the 2012 anti-Japanese protests.

We conducted a small-scale experiment in street politics. The rationality, restraint, peace, and harmony of the three-day political gathering proved our experiment successful. Guangzhou's civic society achieved an initial victory in collectively exercising its political rights. Street politics is not the source of unrest as autocrats slanderously claim; an independent, self-governing civic society can engage in it in an orderly, constructive manner, exercising full control. After 24 years of forging ahead, China's opposition movement has matured sufficiently to shape and control the political landscape. It possesses the capacity to unite diverse sectors through civil society, advancing step by step toward the ultimate goal of constitutional democracy. It also has the ability to dissolve hostility and foster consensus through fearless, unceasing action, paving the way for a pluralistic, win-win political path. An early scene at the protest site held profound symbolic meaning: fundamentally, citizens exercising their political rights—such as assembly, procession, and demonstration—to express oversight, criticism,

and opposition toward the government constitute matters of paramount importance to the nation and society. Traffic order on a major thoroughfare, as a minor local interest, should make appropriate concessions for this purpose—for instance, through temporary traffic control measures. Yet, through interaction with the police, Guangzhou citizens participating in the protest chose to retreat entirely to the street corridors to continue their gathering. This effortlessly achieved the compatibility of exercising the right to assembly and maintaining traffic order. Meanwhile, Southern Media's work operations proceeded normally, undisturbed. The genuine joy on the faces of editors and journalists as they entered and exited the main gate bore witness to their pride and emotion as cherished citizens.

Without question, I myself, along with all citizens participating in the street protests and political assemblies in solidarity with Southern Weekly, were rightfully exercising our political rights—including the rights to assembly, procession, and demonstration—as enshrined in the noble provision of Article 35 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China. When the autocratic Tuo Zhen trampled upon the freedom of speech rights of Southern Weekly, the people's voice, it was entirely justified for us to gather in the streets, steadfastly exercising our civic political rights to express our anger, protest, and defend freedom of speech—as well as our yearning for constitutional democracy. Our actions align with the fundamental spirit of the law—the supreme law upon which the Constitution and statutes are based: the justice of nature, the divine law, or what may be called eternal natural law. They comply with Article 35 of the Constitution, a sound provision enacted in accordance with this supreme law. Our group activities were restrained and orderly, their peaceful and harmonious nature evident to all, without violating criminal law.

Yet the orderly and successful conduct of our three-day political assembly, its mutually beneficial outcomes for officials and citizens alike, and the wave of street politics it inspired nationwide as a shining example—all provoked the hostility of the post-totalitarian stability maintenance apparatus. Thus, the machinery of dictatorship sprang into action, its gears grinding to life: I was arrested, detained, and prosecuted.

As a veteran participant in the rights defense movement, I have always emphasized legal norms and refrained from making assertions without a

reliable factual basis. In the interrogation transcript from the Tianhe Public Security Bureau's Preliminary Investigation Brigade on October 22, the names of Chen Min and Guo Chunping appeared—individuals whom the interrogator clearly knew nothing about and who had no connection whatsoever to the three-day political gathering. From this, I can infer that the true author of that interrogation transcript was my old adversary, the State Security Division of the Guangzhou Municipal Public Security Bureau's First Branch, likely directed by special envoys from the Ministry of Public Security and others behind the scenes. The "Prosecution Opinion" drafted by the Tianhe Public Security Bureau's Preliminary Investigation Brigade also far exceeded their information base and imagination. Like this "Indictment" bearing the prosecutor's name, it must be the masterpiece of the State Security Bureau—that is, the secret service system.

Out of respect for law and history, I refuse to participate in such "proxy games" in this solemn setting. Of course, whether onstage or behind the scenes, you are one and the same—components of the vast dictatorial machinery and stability maintenance apparatus. Therefore, in this court defense statement, I invite you to appear as a unified whole, encompassing both front and backstage. You, who view constitutional democracy as an abyss, and we, who see it as a bright future—as the true legal parties in this case—shall appear together before the false court, the real court, and the eternal court of history, to face judgment and adjudication.

Below, I will first directly and systematically refute and defend against the indictment's charge that I "gathered to disrupt public order in a serious manner" during the "Southern Weekly New Year's Address Incident"—that is, the street protest in solidarity with Southern Weekly.

II. Court Defense Statement (Part I)

1. While it is entirely lawful for groups to assemble and express criticism or opposition to the government, exercising political rights such as travel, assembly, processions, and demonstrations, I myself was not in fact the organizer of the street protests in solidarity with Southern Weekly and have no right to claim this historical contribution as my own.

The indictment accuses me of "being a ringleader in gathering a crowd to disrupt public order."As previously stated, the mass gathering in solidarity with Southern Weekly was not orchestrated by any individual. It was the

natural outcome of the wave of support spreading across major microblog platforms from January 4 to 6, 2013, involving tens of millions of netizens. Yuan Xiaohua and Yuan Fengchu (Yuan Bing) were merely courageous individual participants—they were not, and could not have been, the organizers.

On the evenings of January 5th and 6th, when Yuan Xiaohua and Yuan Fengchu (Yuan Bing) separately approached me to ask what they should write on their placards before heading to the scene, I explicitly suggested including phrases like "freedom of the press" and "constitutional democracy." My purpose in making this suggestion, as well as in taking other actions, was to promote the dissemination of these grand political ideals, thereby elevating citizens' spontaneous street protests to a state of conscious political assembly. I made significant contributions to the success of this escalation—the politicization of the protests—and am willing to bear direct legal responsibility for it. However, I solemnly state: Both the political assembly I actively facilitated, and the citizens' spontaneous street protests were entirely lawful exercises of political rights—including assembly, procession, and demonstration—as guaranteed by the constitutionally sound Article 35. They did not violate Article 291 of the Criminal Law.

2. Throughout the entire street protest and assembly activities in support of Southern Weekly—including my own speeches on-site, as well as the placard displays, publicity efforts, and speeches by Yuan Xiaohua, Yuan Fengchu (Yuan Bing), Liu Yuandong, and others—no disruption to public order occurred in any sense.

The only location where participants gathered that constituted a public place was the sidewalk corridor outside the Southern Media Group compound on the west side of Guangzhou Avenue and its main thoroughfare. Both roadways and sidewalks are public spaces open to the public, generally referred to as traffic passages—the "traffic" referred to in Article 291 of the Criminal Law.

Throughout the three days of street protests and assemblies, Guangzhou Avenue's main roadway was never obstructed by the supporting protesters. On the morning of January 7, as soon as supporters began gathering, they accepted on-site police advice to retreat entirely from the small semicircular area outside the Southern Media compound to the sidewalk corridor.

Thereafter, protests and assemblies continued exclusively on the sidewalk corridor, while Guangzhou Avenue remained as unimpeded as usual. Regarding the sidewalk corridor, during the three-day gathering, hundreds of people simultaneously occupied over 100 meters of sidewalk. At times, the walking speed of passersby was slowed, but normal passage remained fundamentally unimpeded. There was absolutely no instance of overcrowding or obstruction rendering the area impassable.

3. The workspace within the Southern Media Group compound constitutes private property and space exclusively for use by its staff, and does not fall under the definition of a public place as specified in Article 291 of the Criminal Law.

Public places, as defined in Article 291 of the Criminal Law—such as "stations, docks, civil airports, shopping malls, parks, theaters, exhibition halls, and stadiums"—share a common characteristic: their operational spaces are specifically designed to accommodate large, indeterminate numbers of external visitors for consumption, entertainment, or as transit points for subsequent travel. Spaces specifically designed for use by large, indeterminate numbers of the public are generally termed public spaces, or public places. The "transportation" subsequently mentioned in Article 291 of the Criminal Law also constitutes a special type of public place, specifically designated as a public transportation passageway for public use.

The premises within the Southern Media Group compound, serving as the production and operational site for Southern Media Group, are exclusively designated for internal staff engaged in media production, editorial activities, management, and service-related functions. These spaces constitute private property, under the exclusive use of a private entity, and do not qualify as public spaces or public venues.

If my actions, or those of other citizens participating in the protest or assembly, genuinely and directly disrupted the normal operations of Southern Media or the passage of personnel and vehicles at its entrance, then such conduct would essentially constitute an infringement of private rights and would not fall under the criminal charge of "gathering a crowd to disrupt order in a public place" under Article 291 of the Criminal Law. It must be emphasized, however, that during the three days of protests and political gatherings, neither I nor any other citizen disrupted Southern Media's

operations or access. People entered and exited the Southern Media gate normally without obstruction. All Southern Media publications continued their regular publication schedules, maintaining calm and normal operations. There was never any attempt by supporters to forcibly enter the compound to express support for Southern Weekly.

4. In mid-January 2013, Southern Media Group issued a "Statement of Circumstances" asserting: "Southern Media Group is an influential media conglomerate in China. Its publications include Southern Daily, the official newspaper of the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee; Southern Magazine, the official journal of the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee; and Southern News Network, the official website of the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee and Provincial Government." From January 6 to 9, 2013, large crowds gathered at the compound entrance, significantly disrupting the group's operational order and obstructing the normal entry and exit of personnel and vehicles." This statement was clearly orchestrated by the post-totalitarian stability maintenance apparatus, specifically targeting my case. It implicitly suggested that the workspaces within the Southern Media compound had a public character, or that certain media outlets functioned as organs of state power.

My rebuttal is unequivocal: Southern Media Group is a legally independent legal entity. Regardless of whether it is state-owned or privately held, it is fundamentally a private-sector entity operating in a free-market economy. The premises within the Southern Media compound, serving as operational facilities for production and business activities, do not alter their fundamental nature as private spaces merely because they are shared with state-run media outlets or publications affiliated with Party and government organs—unless such users themselves fall under the category of "stations, docks, civil airports, shopping malls, parks, theaters, exhibition halls, or sports stadiums," thereby opening its gates to the public for extensive access and use, transforming part of the compound into public space. Even if the Southern Media Group itself labels areas within its compound as "public spaces," this does not alter their fundamental nature as "private spaces."

Regarding the claim in the Statement of Circumstances that media outlets within the compound, such as the Southern Daily, are Party and government newspapers, periodicals, and websites, we must thoroughly

examine whether these Party and government media outlets can be characterized as organs of power. If so, does the existence of these organs fundamentally alter the nature of the premises within the Southern Media compound? If it does, then it should not be classified as a "public place" but rather, according to its essential attributes, as the "location of state organs." If this were indeed the case, the indictment should not have invoked Article 291 of the Criminal Law but rather Article 290 to charge other citizens and me with "assembling a crowd to storm state organs." Had the indictment genuinely substituted this new charge, my rebuttal would be simpler: neither the other citizens nor I had any knowledge that Southern Daily and others constituted "state organs," nor were these "state organs" connected to the Southern Weekly incident. We had no motive whatsoever to "gather a crowd to storm" these "state organs," nor did we engage in any factual acts of "gathering a crowd to storm" them—we never had any motive or took any action to storm Southern Media, including Southern Weekly. Our actions were intended to show solidarity and protect them, to defend their fundamental rights!

5. Ample evidence demonstrates that other citizens proactively maintained social order at the gathering site through multiple balanced measures. This powerfully attests to our complete lack of subjective intent to "disrupt public order." As summarized earlier, Guangzhou's civil society implemented seven major measures to ensure the orderly conduct of the political assembly outside Southern Media's gates. These included strictly defining the action's objectives and boundaries. Personally, after 5 PM on January 7th, I proactively engaged to persuade protesters to leave the site, establishing a precedent for politically organized gatherings to commence and conclude with restraint. Together, we worked to prevent and quell disruptions and disturbances by individuals with complex motives. The orderly, restrained, peaceful, and harmonious conduct of the three-day political gathering was directly attributable to my own and other citizens' strong commitment to legal order, a high sense of rules and public morality, heightened vigilance against those who view constitutional democracy as an abyss and set traps to frame others, and our mature control capabilities. By the most basic human logic, it is clear that other citizens came solely to express sympathy and support for Southern Weekly. How could we possibly

disrupt the normal work order of the very entity we cherish, or obstruct their legitimate access? If anyone had attempted such actions, I myself would have stepped forward to stop them, and other citizens would have done the same.

6. On the morning of January 7, 2013, Southern Media Group proactively closed its main gate and opened a side entrance for vehicle access. This action was not a reasonable response to the main gate being persistently blocked by supporters or to vehicles being congested and unable to pass safely. Rather, it was an abnormal overreaction taken in the absence of direct, sustained pressure. They alone bear responsibility for this action; neither other citizens nor I is legally liable.

In its January "Statement of Circumstances," Southern Media Group stated: "From January 6 to 9, 2013, large crowds gathered at the entrance of the compound at 289 Guangzhou Avenue Middle, Yuexiu District, Guangzhou, where the Group is located. This significantly disrupted the Group's normal workflow, obstructing the usual entry and exit of personnel and vehicles. Consequently, the Group had no choice but to open the normally closed side gates on the southeast and southwest sides to divert personnel and vehicle traffic. Some of the Group's meetings (activities) were forced to be canceled."

Let us briefly reconstruct the facts:

On the morning of January 7, 2013, a large number of netizens gathered spontaneously at the entrance to Southern Media to show support for Southern Weekly. Many citizens placed the flowers they had brought at the gate, aiming for Southern Weekly's editors and journalists to see them and feel society's care. Due to the large number of people gathering in a short period, vehicle access at the gate became quite inconvenient, so Southern Media temporarily closed the gate. At this point, some supporters occupied the edge of Guangzhou Avenue, a major thoroughfare. If this continued, traffic on the main road could indeed be affected. Seeing this, the on-site public security officers repeatedly urged the supporters to leave the area near the main gate and move to the sidewalks along the main road. The supporters found this reasonable and accepted the suggestion, quickly relocating entirely to the sidewalk corridors. People withdrew not only from the edge of Guangzhou Avenue but also from the entrance of Southern Media. Consequently, vehicle access at the entrance returned to normal. During the

subsequent three consecutive days of gatherings, few people lingered at the entrance for extended periods. Citizens' political assemblies consistently took place within the sidewalk corridors.

Under these stable and orderly conditions, Southern Media had ample time and sufficient evidence to make a calm and clear-headed assessment of the fundamental situation. With no crowd congestion at the entrance, peaceful, rational supporters holding their assembly activities within the sidewalk corridor, and public security officers effectively managing traffic and security at the scene, Southern Media should have reopened its gates before the end of the workday on January 7th to restore normal vehicle access. Yet Southern Media did not do so. Without any direct pressure or danger, it kept the gates closed. This constitutes a severe overreaction. If Southern Media genuinely had operational needs requiring vehicle access at that time, and the side gate could not fully accommodate them, then this overreaction would still exceed common sense.

Consider this simple analogy to highlight the absurdity of this overreaction: Supporters who cherish and defend Southern Weekly are like an elderly woman with mobility issues pushing a vegetable cart. The leadership of Southern Media Group is like a pedestrian. Seeing the elderly woman approaching on the main road with her cart, the pedestrian steps aside to avoid an accident. If he merely steps to the curb, waits for the old woman and her cart to pass, and then returns to the road, his reaction is appropriate. But if, out of excessive caution, he jumps into the ditch beside the road for safety and remains crouched there long after the old woman and her cart have passed, refusing to emerge, then his reaction is not only excessive but borders on the irrational. Legally, he should bear full responsibility for any losses incurred from his own excessive reaction. Of course, if the pedestrian's overreaction stemmed not from genuine apprehension but from being manipulated by a scoundrel seeking to extort the old woman afterward, that would be a different matter entirely.

It is well known that the statement issued by Southern Media Group was clearly intended to provide core evidence for framing us within the post-totalitarian stability-maintenance system, which views constitutional democracy as an abyss. Regrettably, this evidence holds no legal weight. Even if it were valid, the indictment could not rely on it to charge us under

Article 291 of the Criminal Law.

The images of my activities and those of other citizens at the scene provided by the investigating authorities can be broadly categorized into three types: (1) Images of protesters engaging in activities before accepting the public security police's suggestion to move to the sidewalk corridor, including images showing the difficulty of vehicle passage at the main gate; (2) Images of me and other citizens participating in activities within the sidewalk corridor; (3) Images of myself delivering a speech outside the Southern Media Group entrance on the afternoon of January 7. The images in categories (1) and (2) do not contradict the allegations in this section. The implications of the images in category (3) will be specifically analyzed in the following section.

7. The indictment accuses me of "seriously disrupting public order at the entrance of Southern Weekly." Investigative authorities presented images showing me standing on the center line outside the gate while delivering a speech on January 7, 2013. This fact was presented as primary evidence that I obstructed vehicle access to Southern Media. However, inferring that I obstructed vehicles from entering or exiting the premises based solely on the fact that my feet were positioned on the center line outside the gate during my speech reverses the sequence of events and causes of effect. This conclusion severely violates the law of sufficient reason, constitutes excessive inference, and is untenable.

〈1〉Southern Media closed its main gate and opened a side gate for vehicle access on the morning of January 7th, while my speech took place around 3:00 PM that same day. I chose to speak at the main gate precisely because it remained closed, and the open space outside offered ample room without causing excessive crowding. Had the gate not been closed, I would not have spoken there but would have chosen a less crowded section of the sidewalk. My speech on the afternoon of January 7 could not have been the reason Southern Media closed its gates that morning.

The speech lasted only fifteen minutes. Immediately afterward, I left

the main gate and moved to the sidewalk corridor south of it. The audience dispersed shortly after, and the area around the main gate returned to its sparse, low-traffic state, where it remained for the rest of the afternoon. I cannot comprehend why Southern Media Group—which publicly claimed eleven months later that citizens' protest gatherings caused the gate to remain impassable—kept the gate closed that afternoon and for several days afterward, failing to restore normal passage. In any case, my brief speech and stay of just over ten minutes could not possibly have been the reason the gate remained closed thereafter.

〈3〉Approximately two hours after my speech, around 5 PM, as various units were closing for the day, I proactively stepped in and successfully persuaded the protest supporters to withdraw. The crowd subsequently dispersed. Even the sidewalk corridor returned to its usual state. It can be said that other citizens and I, building upon the foundation of no ongoing congestion at the gate, created the best conditions to alleviate Southern Media's concerns. Yet Southern Media still did not reopen the gate.

〈4〉During my speech, whenever vehicles approached from inside or outside the gate, I immediately paused to urge listeners to yield the way with me. Upon realizing vehicles also used this entrance during working hours, I promptly retreated from the main gate to the sidewalk corridor. This is corroborated by the consistent pattern of actions I demonstrated throughout the three-day political gathering, as summarized in Point 5, which reflected my high regard for legal order and constant vigilance in maintaining peace and harmony at the site. In the absence of vehicles requiring passage, my right to stand on the sidewalk was unassailable.

The images presented by the investigating authorities of my activities at the main gate precisely capture the scene during my speech around 3:00 PM on January 7. These images are entirely consistent with the statements in points (1), (2), and (3) of this section, and clearly show no vehicles entering or exiting the gate at that time.

You have twisted the truth, portraying me—who has demonstrated a strong commitment to order and resolutely opposed disruption—as a disturber obstructing vehicle access at the Southern Media Group entrance. This is utterly unreasonable and illogical. I suspect even you yourselves do not believe this fabrication, resorting to such baseless accusations solely for political expediency.

8. The indictment alleges that my gathering to disrupt public order constituted "serious circumstances." This legal characterization lacks credible legal evidence, suffers from severe logical inconsistencies, and relies on exaggerated accusations.

〈1〉The indictment specifies that I "severely disrupted order at public places such as the entrance of Southern Media." As previously stated, this is entirely inconsistent with the facts. Moreover, logically, it is absurd to conclude that my gathering constituted "serious disruption" based on the situation at Southern Media's entrance. As a public space, the entrance is merely a pedestrian passageway, not a major thoroughfare. Even if "disrupted," the negative consequences would be relatively minor. The legal liability of the perpetrator would at most fall within the scope of administrative penalties, bearing no relation whatsoever to "serious circumstances" warranting criminal prosecution. The indictment grossly exaggerates the consequences of my fifteen-minute speech and presence, using such a measure to establish criminal liability—a display of chaotic logic and extreme exaggeration.

〈2〉The legal assessment of disruptions to sidewalk order can only be determined based on the extent of damage to the sidewalk's primary function of facilitating pedestrian traffic. The negative impact on Southern Media Group's production and operations, which is not a sidewalk, falls outside the scope of Article 291 of the Criminal Law and should instead be addressed under relevant statutes governing the adjustment of private rights and private relationships.

〈3〉In its Statement of Circumstances, Southern Media Group claimed that the gathering of netizens obstructed access to the main entrance, forcing the cancellation of "some of the Group's (meeting) activities." However, this assertion is highly vague and general. The following questions must be addressed: ① Which specific events were canceled during the three-day gathering? ② Were these events genuinely canceled solely because access through the main entrance was difficult, and the side entrance could not resolve the passage issue? ③Among these canceled events, how many were directly caused by my fifteen-minute speech and presence? ④ For the above three points, what documentary evidence, witness testimony, and physical evidence can be cross-referenced and compared to provide full and reliable proof? Southern Media Corporation must respond to these compelling questions. Furthermore, both these responses and the previous Statement of Circumstances must be submitted to an independent, authoritative appraisal agency for investigation and verification. My defense counsel and I further demand that relevant witnesses from Southern Media Group appear in court for cross-examination. Otherwise, the Statement of Circumstances, as a unilateral, unverified accusation, is highly suspect in authenticity and legally null and void. The fact that Southern Media Group has turned against those who supported and protected me, accusing them of crimes, is deeply contrary to human decency and common sense. This alone makes it imperative that

the Statement of Circumstances undergo rigorous legal procedures to either verify or disprove its claims.

9. The indictment accuses me of "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order." Its evidence, reasoning, and conclusions categorically label citizens' legitimate exercise of political rights through group assemblies, marches, and demonstrations as "disrupting order." This lacks any objective, fair, or precise evaluation criteria, constituting a highly subjective and arbitrary presumption.

Our three-day political gathering proceeded in an orderly, restrained, peaceful, and harmonious manner, causing no disruption to the operation of any public space. Without disorder occurring, how can there be disturbance?

On the morning of the first day of protests and assemblies, following interactions between police and citizens, all citizens supporting the protests promptly relocated to the sidewalk corridors. From that point onward, the protest and assembly proceeded in an orderly manner along the sidewalk corridor, establishing a classic sidewalk protest model that balanced vital interests across the public and private spheres. This self-regulated sidewalk protest model, grounded in respect for the rule of law, is lawful in any modern, civilized nation and poses no criminal violation.

Citizens participating in protests and assemblies have exercised their political rights with dignity, expressing the most moderate political demands: freedom of speech and constitutional democracy. Our political operations and actions reject fanaticism, dissolve hostility, and possess a strong ideological character. Such civilized, rational, and peaceful opposition sets an excellent example for China's inevitable upcoming political transition. Our actions exert such profoundly positive and constructive impacts on both the surface and underlying fabric of social order—they are far from the negative connotations of chaos, disruption, or rioting.

What warrants deep reflection is that Article 291 of the Criminal Law, cited and relied upon in the indictment, blatantly employs terms like "gathering crowds" and "disrupting"—phrases laden with strong negative connotations and preconceived judgments—to describe legitimate group actions by citizens exercising political rights such as assembly, procession, and demonstration, as recognized by Article 35 of the Constitution. This

foreshadows a fundamental premise aimed at vilifying, trampling upon, and obliterating citizens' political rights to assembly, procession, and demonstration. Under this premise, all legitimate group actions by Chinese citizens exercising their rights are categorized as criminal offenses violating criminal law. This malicious, anti-constitutional, anti-natural justice, medieval-style "political law" is a draconian statute that violates the fundamental spirit of law.

The core term "disrupt" in Article 291 of the Criminal Law lacks fundamental legal precision in its operational application or measurement criteria: What degree of disturbance in a public place constitutes formal "disruption"? What objective, graded, and verifiable standards determine whether disruption has occurred? Article 291 provides no such necessary definitions. This deliberately crafted, crude, ambiguous, and elastic legal provision leaves boundless room for arbitrariness, discretion, and capricious judgment by public security, procuratorial, and judicial authorities. Thus, it has been successfully forged into a potent legal instrument for the authoritarian stability maintenance apparatus to suppress the cause of freedom and democracy.

Clearly, the purpose of this draconian law is not to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Chinese citizens, but to use state power and the legal net to destroy and erase the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Chinese people. Based on this draconian law, the Indictment, lacking reliable legal evidence and objective, verifiable standards, has leaped to unfounded conclusions. It has arbitrarily and retroactively attributed the lawful exercise of our rights by other citizens and me to "gathering crowds to disrupt public order." Such highly subjective and arbitrary presumptions and accusations in the Indictment directly trample upon the fundamental procedural rationality and procedural justice of modern legal civilization.

In summary, the indictment's charge that my participation in protests and assemblies in solidarity with Southern Weekly constitutes "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order with serious circumstances" is legally invalid and cannot stand.

However, my defense grounded in eternal justice does not stop here.

III. Court Defense Statement (Part II)

You detained, arrested, and imprisoned me for 15 months based solely

on my speech delivered outside the Southern Media Group headquarters on January 7. You exhausted every means, digging to the depths of the earth, yet failed to uncover a single piece of legal evidence to confirm that I disrupted order.In truth, not only my speech at the scene but all my activities in solidarity with the Southern Weekly incident were conducted in full compliance with Article 35 of the Constitution—a sound legal provision—dignifiedly exercising citizens' political rights to assembly, procession, and demonstration. My actions did not disrupt traffic order on the main thoroughfare or pedestrian walkways, nor did they interfere with the normal operations of Southern Media or the movement of its personnel and vehicles. My conduct was entirely lawful and did not violate Article 291 of the Criminal Law.

To defend the freedom of speech for all Chinese citizens, including those at Southern Weekly; to promote the normalization of citizens' political rights; to pave the way for orderly political opening and the decisive growth of civil society; and to cultivate momentum for the process of freedom and democracy—we resolutely advanced this street political assembly. Our political purpose is serious, our action goals are restrained, our operational methods are open and above board, broad-minded and respectful. Our group gathering was orderly and peaceful, and the social effect of our assembly was a win-win for officials and citizens, gradually melting hostility.

My actions serve the core interests of the Chinese nation—the cause of constitutional democracy—and are healthy, positive, constructive, and transparent. I am entirely innocent. Yet you, who view constitutional democracy as an abyss, have abused your power to arrest me, subjecting me to unjust accusations. The charge of disturbing public order against me is entirely fabricated. The detention imposed and today's trial based on this charge constitute outright political persecution—not only illegal but criminal. Your attempt to suppress China's surging democratic tide by arbitrarily arresting and wrongfully convicting dozens of us, pioneers of democratic action, is a colossal and historic crime.

The sun shines brightly, and rivers never flow backward. Through the ages, your fabrication of charges and persecution against us freedom and democracy activists will forever be a disgrace!

In the specific application of the law, your term "disturbance" is

ambiguous, fluid, infinitely elastic, and arbitrarily applied. Yet this is merely its superficial structure. Its underlying structure, however, is stable, rigid, and unambiguous. The deep structure of your term "disturbance"—its true definition—is as obvious as Sima Zhao's ambitions: any assembly, procession, or demonstration by Chinese citizens criticizing, opposing, or protesting the government equals "disturbing" order!!!

Whenever we exercise our constitutionally guaranteed political rights under Article 35 to hold assemblies, processions, or demonstrations, you accuse us of disrupting public order. Since our gatherings must occur in public spaces, you claim we disrupt the order of those venues. Sometimes, even when we assemble at location A, you assert we've disrupted order at location B—or even expand the accusation to claim we've disrupted societal order as a whole. No matter how orderly our assemblies, parades, or demonstrations are conducted, no matter how mild our expressions, without disrupting the normal operations of any public place or institution, you equate our very act of gathering as a "disturbance of order." Thus, all our public protests expressing criticism and dissent in accordance with the law become acts of "disturbing order" as defined by you, and all become criminal offenses under the special provisions you define.

This dual-structured definition of "disturbance" you employ does not draw from a normal dictionary, but from another dictionary entirely—one that defies common sense and established conventions. Your dictionary is a specially compiled totalitarian lexicon designed to implement political persecution and comprehensive dictatorship. It labels dictatorship as "democracy," enslavement as "freedom," existence without dignity as "human rights," high-pressure control as "harmony," peaceful opposition as solely "subversion" of a violent nature, and the free expression of thought and speech as "inciting subversion." Similarly, it defines collective activities exercising citizens' political rights as "disturbing public order."

According to your totalitarian lexicon, "where there's a will to convict, there's always a charge." To suppress China's opposition movement and stifle the growth of independent civil society forces, you first condemn us using the deep structure of specialized terminology (like "disturbance"), then fabricate evidence through its superficial structure. The charge that I "crossed the center line" to disrupt order is legally untenable. Yet even if I

were to speak on the sidewalk, you would fabricate new targets for disruption, falsely accusing me of obstructing pedestrians and thus violating criminal law. Your term "disrupting public order" is a catch-all bag, large enough to stuff all our legitimate public protests into, leaving us at your mercy. As long as we exercise our political rights as citizens under the noble provision of Article 35 of the Constitution—as long as we assemble, march, and demonstrate with dignity—we will forever be criminals in your dictionaries and legal codes. Only by becoming subjects, commoners, or compliant citizens stripped of all political rights do we conform to your definition of legality. Through Articles 291, 105, 290, and 296 of the Criminal Law, you have successfully undermined and overturned Article 35 of the Constitution. In effect, you have stripped all Chinese citizens of their political rights, tightly binding our inherently free bodies. These tyrannical legal provisions, with totalitarianism as their heart and soul, are the chains you use to enslave us. Though they may have sacred justification in your lexicon, they are filled with our blood and tears.

We have awakened. We have overcome fear and hesitation, standing on the high ground where we advance unstoppably toward the future. The stirring of the ideals of freedom and democracy, and the inherent force of life itself, determine that we will not endure your oppression and bondage forever. Upholding constitutional governance that aligns with nature, reclaiming our lives, breaking free from the chains, and winning freedom—this is the mission and destiny of our generation.

Over a century ago, the Chinese nation was the first to break free from imperial autocracy, establishing Asia's first democratic polity. Yet, amid internal strife and external threats, this first democratic experiment failed, plunging us into the abyss of totalitarian enslavement. Economic reforms since 1978 have granted the Chinese people partial civil rights and economic freedom. Yet the half-decayed post-totalitarian system, clinging to the privatization of power and refusing genuine political reform, has left the Chinese people enduring political and ideological enslavement that remains unresolved to this day. Today, China's economy ranks second globally, yet its citizens lack the right to elect or run for leadership positions at any level, the freedom to establish newspapers or websites, freedom of speech, the right to assemble, demonstrate, or form associations, religious liberty, or access to

fair judicial trials and protection from torture and abuse. In today's China, the people lack political sovereignty. Society is saturated with an atmosphere of enslavement and dumbing down. The people's free exploration and assertion of rights are universally deemed illegal, shackled by layers of chains forged from draconian laws and the machinery of dictatorship. Human rights are absent, replaced by the tyranny, brutality, and humiliation of official power. The gap between rich and poor widens, corruption is rampant, opportunities are unequal, and mediocrities hold power. Lies, nonsense, and bureaucratic formalism abound, while a ruthless philosophy of the jungle and cynical opportunism permeate society. Such a political society—rich in wealth but devoid of fairness, abundant in material goods yet lacking in spirit, boasting Olympic-scale grandeur without soul—such a fractured entity of personality, values, and rules, such a machine society stripped of dignity, sovereignty, and humanity—is unacceptable. It is a reality that an awakened generation of citizens cannot endure.

Sovereignty—above all else, sovereignty! The awakened citizenry demands that the post-totalitarian system restore the people's sovereignty, return governance to the people, and affirm our human dignity grounded in popular sovereignty and individual political sovereignty. After enduring prolonged economic growth, the paramount core interest of the Chinese nation now lies in dismantling totalitarianism's political and ideological enslavement of the populace, transforming the privatization of power into its public ownership, and establishing a genuine constitutional democracy. This is also the key to resolving the vast majority of contradictions, crises, and latent concerns within Chinese society. Anyone opposing constitutional democracy is a traitor to the nation. A true patriot, upon awakening as a citizen with modern civilized consciousness, should regard opposing totalitarianism to reclaim sovereignty and opposing enslavement to fight for freedom as their fundamental political duty and mission.

Following the failure of the 1989 student movement, China's grassroots opposition forces were largely dispersed. After 24 years of arduous accumulation, these forces have regained vitality and coalesced once more under the banner of the rights defense movement. Amidst the convergence of major trends—economic transformation having laid a robust material foundation for political transition, significant fractures emerging within the

post-totalitarian bloc, and the international community offering strong moral support to China's forces of freedom—this generation is fortuitously approaching a new starting line: the launchpad for the Chinese nation's second democratic experiment.

To embrace and nurture this historic opportunity, the rights defense movement primarily advocates for a peaceful political transition. The Chinese nation, weary of bloodshed and turmoil, must advance constitutional democracy in an orderly manner, guided by the overarching principles of peace, stability, and growth—a collective responsibility and obligation for all citizens. However, this "orderly" transition must not be a self-enclosed, top-down design and iron-fisted control by authoritarian reformers, nor should it be tutelage under authoritarianism. Instead, it should be a political arrangement of openness, large-scale competition, self-governance, and balance under the rule of law—based on the premise of popular sovereignty, led by civil society, and achieved through roundtable consensus among all strata and forces. Throughout this process, the strength and civilized governance of the citizenry will be pivotal to peaceful transformation. To cultivate civic power, rights defense movements have consistently propelled the development and balanced growth of opposition movements and civil society. By systematically and openly exercising various civic political rights, we achieve the substantive expansion and strengthening of civic political power. Grounded in an independent and autonomous civil society, we advance the constructive nature of opposition forces—formed at the appropriate time—toward a multi-party competitive structure within an open political society. This ultimately promotes a constitutional democratic revolution in governance—this is the concise and clear operational path of our rights defense movement.

This operational roadmap has now advanced to a new stage of upgrading toward a strong political social movement. The primary obstacle encountered at this stage is the prevalence of unjust laws. Yet the pivotal point for the success of peaceful transition lies precisely here: we must begin by breaking through the chains of unjust laws, step by step expanding citizens' freedom of action, step by step increasing citizens' political rights, step by step stripping away illegal privileges and the coercive power that enslaves the people. Only then can the common people, once deprived of

political rights, be transformed into a generation of sovereign citizens who possess full political rights and actively exercise them, thereby becoming the cornerstone supporting the democratic process. To achieve and consolidate these rights in a protracted struggle, we must adhere to the rules of modern civilization. The factual rights demonstrated through civic action must be solidified into institutionalized legal rights offering universal and effective remedies. This requires rights defense movements not only to drive fearless civic actions that challenge unjust laws but also to propel a grand social movement to abolish harmful legislation and enact sound laws. Legal rights defense must be conducted in tandem with street politics, ideological struggles, and public opinion battles, creating synergistic effects. Through successive phased advances, these efforts will foster a roundtable consensus, multiple forces converge until fundamental legal reform is achieved. Only then can "freedom under the law" within a constitutional democracy gain effective institutional safeguards, ultimately liberating citizens from bondage and fully realizing their political rights.

This provides a clear and unambiguous understanding of and positioning for my strategic and legal orientation in participating in street protests and political assemblies in solidarity with Southern Weekly.

This also provides a clear framework for interpreting my involvement in promoting the citizens' petition urging the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the "Eight-City Flash Mob" street awareness campaign on the same theme: In the post-totalitarian era, draconian laws have become the hallmark of the post-totalitarian system's enslavement of the Chinese people. By serving as tools for manufacturing political injustices to suppress opposition forces and instilling widespread political fear among the populace, these laws have become a direct obstacle to the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation, the cause of constitutional democracy. For the rights defense movement dedicated to advancing an orderly political revolution, it has become both an urgent priority and a superior choice to launch a new, multidimensional social movement for reform—one that eliminates harmful laws and amends beneficial ones—within the constraints of a platform prioritizing the rule of law, procedural co-construction, and consensus-based mutual benefit required for peaceful transition. The citizen petition urging the National

People's Congress to ratify the ICCPR, along with offline publicity efforts, represents one of the initial experiments in this movement for legal reform and institutional restructuring.

The significance of this movement extends far beyond superficial actions. Participating citizens are not merely exercising political rights like assembly, procession, and demonstration; they are exploring and practicing the profound meaning of popular sovereignty. Popular sovereignty represents the collective sovereignty of a nation's citizens over their political society and power structures. It is neither a monolithic monster nor an illusion, but rather the flat aggregation of every citizen's individual political sovereignty. The procedural or remedial decisions made by a nation's citizens, which guide the practical movement governing its highest political affairs, constitute the concrete manifestation of popular sovereignty. The supreme legislative power, the supreme personnel authority, the supreme control power, and the ultimate right of resistance witnessed within this process all constitute the core elements of popular sovereignty. Popular sovereignty is not created by an illusory, amorphous will of the people; its true foundation lies in humanity's humanitarian ideals and natural law. As the ancient saying goes: "The interests of the people are the highest law." The primary and fundamental interests of the people are their basic rights, around which all other interests revolve. Natural law is the overarching principle protecting these fundamental human rights from infringement.

Natural law is also commonly referred to as natural justice or abstract justice. Indeed, justice is abstract, yet it is neither a priori nor void. The intrinsic and ultimate foundation of human fundamental rights is humanity. Based on the humanity that respects people as people, each individual possesses infinitely precious spiritual value. Personal life is priceless, inviolable, and cannot be enslaved. Without humanity, there is no justice; without humanity, there is no natural law. And without justice or natural law, humanity lacks teeth, insufficient to expel or regulate humanity's own animalistic nature. Positive humanity and negative justice form the core of human civilization. Human fundamental rights—the basic individual freedoms regulated by justice and endowed by the ideal of humanity—include the right to life, the right to personal safety, property rights, freedom of movement, political sovereignty, and more. Humanity's revelation of

humanity, natural law, or justice is an evolutionary historical process. Thus, natural law can be discovered but not taught; it can be expanded but not altered. It has been indirectly expressed in the concrete legal forms of various eras, revered as the core spirit of law. The legitimacy of law derives from natural law; laws that violate it are unjust. Since the dawn of civilization, when humanity and justice emerged, law has operated across the earth. Supreme judicial authority belongs to society as a whole. Early unwritten customary law was chosen by the people and operated through their voluntary acceptance, embodying the people's latent supreme legislative power. The legislative oaths of the Jin state during China's Spring and Autumn period, the pluralistic legislative authority documented in the Roman Jurisprudential Treatise, and the judge-made law movement within England's medieval common law system all bear witness to the universal existence of the people's supreme legislative power. As royal authority expanded, the adjudication and enforcement of legal matters became institutionalized, gradually stripping the people of their supreme legislative power. The modern Western parliamentary democracy's emphasis on legislative power, through institutionalization and separation of powers, reflects both the evolutionary level of labor division in legislative affairs and the partial encroachment and control of popular sovereignty over the power system within robust institutional arrangements safeguarding freedom. For unlocking the moral value and creative energy of the people's supreme legislative power, this represents merely a beginning.

Our current movement to amend laws and reform institutions is a continuation of this historical tradition—a process through which civil society advances toward and seizes the substantive content of popular sovereignty.

Fundamentally, this social movement to eliminate harmful laws and refine sound ones constitutes the exercise of the people's supreme legislative power. Laws are public instruments for all under heaven; fundamental legal reform represents the most efficient transformation, characterized by minimal resistance, maximum synergy, the highest public welfare, broadest benefit, and the greatest expansiveness. In China—a nation with millennia of absence from legal tradition, ravaged by autocracy and totalitarianism—legal issues are most numerous and profound, yet legal reform yields the

greatest impact. However, the interlocking interests within the totalitarian pyramid system and the inertia of rule by man dictate that merely shifting direction within the existing framework cannot achieve the legal transformation required for constitutional democracy. Only by vigorously advancing the exercise of citizens' legal initiative rights and the people's supreme legislative authority—paving pathways for public participation and oversight in lawmaking, and rebuilding a shared legislative framework—can we achieve, on the flat-structured platforms of the information age, the dominance and regulation of rights over power in public legal affairs, and the grand equilibrium between civil society and the state. This ensures the realization of legal transformation. At the operational level, this movement for citizens to exercise supreme legislative power and participate in core political life through amendment and reform operates within society's shared procedural civility and operational framework. It expresses public will through opposition and pressure tactics while engaging in high-quality procedural development and universal rule-making. Supported by a historically emerging generation of rights-defending lawyers and internet technology, it possesses strong operational feasibility and harbors vast space for original subjectivity. Initiatives such as the periodic activation and routine operation of popular constitutional authority, the procedural advancement of citizen-driven lawmaking, the cultivation of a multi-party legislative competition mechanism, online voting or national referendums on bills, and the prudent democratic oversight of the judiciary will all be progressively pursued in the future. In a sense, how we fight for democracy today will determine how we practice democracy tomorrow. Thus, the successful experiences and original contributions of this movement—which emphasizes sovereign practices within civil society under the framework of separation of powers—will crystallize and become integral to the institutional structures of our future democracy.

We are driving the citizen petition and street advocacy experiment for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) because of its grand and solemn significance. The ICCPR represents the authoritative articulation of fundamental human rights by the global community under the auspices of the United Nations, distilling the framework of humanitarian ideals and principles of liberty and justice. As a treaty rather than a

declaration, it carries legal binding force for signatory states and serves as a fundamental law for all humanity.

Through social movements, we aim to forge national consensus and collective action to urge the National People's Congress to ratify the ICCPR. This would align domestic law with the Covenant, establishing universal human rights norms as the soul of domestic legislation. On this new platform of procedural civilization, all provisions in domestic law that conflict with the Covenant could be eliminated and redefined—a comprehensive solution to repealing harmful laws and refining sound ones, representing an advanced stage of legal reform and institutional transformation.

To date, over 160 countries and regions worldwide have acceded to the Covenant. Yet China, as a member of the United Nations and one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, remains outside its fold. The universally recognized fundamental framework remains unrecognized by formal law, unimplemented, and unpromoted among nearly 1.4 billion people who are most deprived of human rights yet most in need of them. This stands as one of the deepest humiliations endured by the Chinese nation today and an intolerable personal indignity for an awakened generation of citizens. Our campaign to urge the National People's Congress to ratify the convention represents one of many collective efforts by civil society to eradicate this shame and defend dignity. The amplifying effect of public opinion in the internet age provides an effective channel for disseminating citizens' moral responsibility. The transition from online signatures to on-the-ground action follows the familiar social movement model of "using small events to drive larger change."

From late February to mid-March 2013, I was placed under 20 days of residential surveillance by Guangzhou State Security during the National "Two Sessions." During this period, I collaborated online with Xiao Shu and others to advance the signature campaign urging the NPC to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. After my surveillance ended in late March, I coordinated with Sun Desheng and Yuan Fengchu (Yuan Bing)—democracy activists who had been active on Guangzhou's streets in recent years—via online discussions and in-person meetings. We agreed to launch on-the-ground actions urging the NPC to ratify the ICCPR. I proposed the action plan, while Sun and Yuan handled its implementation.

In Guangzhou, we finalized the details: beginning in Wuhan, we would conduct a series of "Eight-Region Flash Mob" street publicity activities along the route Wuhan–Yueyang–Changsha–Zhuzhou–Hengyang–Guangzhou–Dongguan. Our approach involved displaying a central banner reading "Urge the National People's Congress to Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" at key locations in each city—such as major parks, memorial towers, main streets, and sidewalks. This served as the outer layer, embodying the collaborative spirit of the national freedom movement to amplify Beijing's civic society agenda. Simultaneously, participants unfurled a second banner reading "Citizens of [City Name] Demand Officials Disclose Assets"—a theme equally reflecting our shared national aspirations. To prevent situations from escalating beyond control, which would violate our consistent principle of exercising rights in an orderly manner and potentially impact the sustainability of initiatives like the "Eight-City Flash Mob," we prearranged for participants to primarily display banners and take flash mob photos at the site, providing only brief public outreach. Staying no longer than 30 minutes, they would then disseminate images via Weibo, QQ, and news websites. This online amplification model maximizes the impact of ground operations while minimizing negative consequences. From April 12 to 20, 2013, Sun Desheng and Yuan Fengchu (Yuan Bing) successfully completed the "Eight-City Flash Mob." Over the following fortnight, Sun Desheng leveraged local networks to extend banner campaigns to cities including Nanning and Shanghai. Clearly, our street publicity experiment—distinctive in theme, limited in scope, meticulous in execution, and highly restrained—still adopted the international model of park-side sidewalk activities. Judging by the responses from civil society and cyberspace, the "Eight-City Flash Mob" was inspiring. It resonated powerfully with related citizen petitions, significantly contributing to the rising tide of the democracy movement in mainland China. The issue of joining the convention increasingly became a focal point of public attention in Chinese society.

The indictment lists the aforementioned series of street publicity activities promoting accession to the Covenant by myself, Sun Desheng, and Yuan Fengchu (Yuan Bing) as the second criminal fact under the charge of "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order." However, it completely omits

any mention of the motivation or theme behind our series of street publicity activities, or even the text on the banners—"Urging the National People's Congress to Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" and "Citizens of [City Name] Demand Officials Disclose Assets," directly violating the fundamental requirement for legal documents to present essential elements of important legal facts completely. This fully reflects the extreme fear of universal human rights values and public anti-corruption demands held by its masterminds and the entire post-totalitarian stability maintenance system, which views constitutional democracy as an abyss. It also reveals their efforts to conceal the political persecution at the core of this case. Such petty tricks are laughable.

During my 11-month detention at Tianhe Detention Center, I frequently observed fellow inmates receiving indictments from the Tianhe District People's Procuratorate or judgments from the Tianhe District People's Court containing direct errors in dates and locations—sometimes utterly nonsensical. Needless to say, these documents were riddled with chaotic factual accounts and legal contradictions. Although the Tianhe District People's Procuratorate's indictment against me did not contain errors like mixing up people's identities or nonsensical statements, it still contained a series of serious legal errors in its wording:

1. The indictment alleges that I conspired with Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing to conduct "street placard demonstrations" in eight cities, and that Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing subsequently carried out such demonstrations in multiple locations. However, the primary documentary evidence of our street publicity activities—over a dozen on-site photographs—clearly shows that Sun Desheng, Yuan Bing, and other participants unfurled banners at each location, not placards. Banners are made of long strips of silk fabric with computer-printed text, whereas placards used nationwide for demonstrations are typically square or rectangular wooden boards or rigid cardboard. In non-legal debates, we might focus solely on substance without distinguishing between "unfolding banners" and "holding placards." However, in courtroom presentations of legal facts, this distinction can determine whether a legal fact is clear, questionable, or indeed established. It is akin to a dispute between Party A and Party B over the ownership of a flock of sheep, yet the prosecution's indictment states that the dispute concerns a herd of cattle.

Such an indictment is legally inadequate.

2. The indictment states that "in early April 2013, defendants Yang Maodong and Sun Desheng, along with co-defendant Yuan Bing, met at their temporary residence in Changsha to plan' street sign demonstrations in eight cities. In reality, Sun Desheng, Yuan Bing, and I never met in Changsha in early April 2013. Our discussions regarding the "Eight-City Flash Mob" street publicity campaign urging the National People's Congress to ratify the convention took place via online communication and in-person meetings in Guangzhou City in late March 2013. The Indictment's reliance on Yuan Bing's testimony in this section is factually inaccurate, rendering its fundamental assertions on this matter unreliable.

3. The indictment describes my participation in street protests supporting Southern Weekly as follows: "It has been lawfully established that at approximately 5:00 PM on January 5, 2013, defendant Yang Maodong organized co-defendants Yuan Xiaohua, Yuan Bing (both indicted), and others to gather at the Fuhua Hotel and nearby cafes in Tianhe District, Guangzhou. They discussed holding placards and delivering speeches at the entrance of Southern Weekly's offices at No. 289 Guangzhou Avenue Middle, Yuexiu District." However, the facts are as follows: 〈1〉 Yuan Xiaohua proactively approached me around 10:00 PM on January 5th—or possibly later—to express his intention to hold signs in support of Southern Weekly at the entrance of the Southern Media Group building. He asked for my advice on what to write on the signs, and I suggested phrases like "Defend Press Freedom." 〈2〉 Yuan Bing expressed his intention to join the sign-holding protest in support of Southern Weekly and also asked me for suggestions on what to write on his sign. I suggested phrases like "Press Freedom, Constitutional

Democracy." This occurred on the evening of January 6th, though the exact time is no longer clear.〈3〉These were two separate dinners held one day apart at entirely different locations. The indictment falsely conflates two distinct gatherings involving different individuals at different times and places into a single event.〈4〉At neither dinner did anyone discuss plans to deliver speeches at the scene.〈5〉Both gatherings were intended to welcome two separate groups of out-of-town friends, not to discuss organizing solidarity activities at the Southern Weekly entrance. When Guangzhou State Security summoned me in February 2013, they informed me they had recorded the entire January 5th gathering at the Fuhua Hotel, clearly documenting the arrival times of certain individuals from Beijing and Guangzhou, including lawyers. The hours-long video recording of this dinner can be presented as direct documentary evidence. While the conversation covered various topics, the focus was not on the Southern Weekly incident, much less on planning street actions to support the magazine—not out of fear, but due to our consistent, prudent strategy. Under the current high-pressure environment, grassroots movements must be carefully nurtured. It is unwise to prematurely encourage citizens to engage in collective street activities through public, proactive means of group deliberation and decision-making. Instead, we should temporarily rely primarily on citizens' individual, conscious choices. However, if citizens have already bravely gathered spontaneously on the streets, we have a responsibility to resolutely

guide that gathering toward a political assembly demanding freedom.

〈6〉 In summary, the portion of the Indictment concerning Yuan Xiaohua and Yuan Bing relies on statements from these individuals that are contrary to the facts. As for the details added by the actual drafters of the Indictment—such as my alleged "organizing," "gathering," "discussing," and "delivering speeches"—these are pure fictional fabrications. Given that I am destined to receive a heavy sentence in this case under the post-totalitarian stability maintenance system, and given that I take great pride in this, what harm would it do if I were to admit, out of vanity, that "I intended to organize gatherings, discuss street protests, exercise my political rights as a citizen, defend freedom of speech, and promote constitutional democracy"? But I cannot do so. My foremost duty is to uphold historical truth—to state facts as they are, never speaking or writing falsehoods for any purpose. If necessary, I may remain silent to protect myself or others, but lying is unacceptable. In this regard, this Indictment—which injects fictional techniques into serious legal narrative—is legally and morally unworthy of emulation.

4. The Indictment states: "The evidence establishing the aforementioned facts is as follows: ... 4. The confessions and defenses of defendants Yang Maodong, Sun Desheng, and co-defendants Yuan Bing, Yuan Xiaohua, etc." However, the facts are as follows:

〈1〉 During interrogations by the Public Security Bureau and the Procuratorate regarding the case, I

consistently adopted a "zero confession" approach. I provided no answers or defenses regarding their allegations of my participation in street protests supporting Southern Weekly or in the "Eight-City Flash Mob" street campaign advocating for the ratification of the Convention. Therefore, there is no question of my confessions or defenses. 〈2〉 According to investigators from the Tianhe Public Security Bureau's Preliminary Investigation Brigade, Sun Desheng—who was detained in the same detention center as me—boasted during interrogation, presenting himself as a champion of democracy. He openly recounted the circumstances surrounding the "Eight-City Flash Mob" campaign advocating for ratification of the conventions, repeatedly asserting that no criminal offenses were committed. To protect me, he even attempted to take primary responsibility upon himself. Since he did not confess, how could there be any confession?! 〈3〉 Yuan Bing and Yuan Xiaohua, listed as co-defendants, endured persistent torture and beatings during their detention at Chibi City Detention Center in Hubei Province. Chen Jianxiong, arrested alongside them, recounted upon his release in late June 2013 the beatings he, Yuan Bing, Yuan Xiaohua, and Huang Wenxun endured from investigating officers and fellow detainees in their cell, as well as Huang Wenxun being subjected to electric shock torture twice. To substantiate his claims, Chen Jianxiong permitted a friend to photograph the injuries on his arms, shoulders, and back resulting from the beatings. His friend subsequently posted these photos online.

Evidently, the confessions made by Yuan Bing and Yuan Xiaohua were extracted under torture and thus constitute illegal evidence that should be excluded through formal investigative procedures. As stated in points 2 and 3 above, the confessions of Yuan Bing and Yuan Xiaohua clearly contradict the facts, indirectly revealing that the statements made by all three individuals were false and perfunctory, rendered under duress. Under the fundamental principles of the modern rule of law, defendants cannot be compelled to incriminate themselves. In politically motivated persecution cases, coercing dissidents into self-incrimination through torture-extracted confessions is particularly egregious and utterly unacceptable! As a party involved, I am keenly aware that the content of Yuan Bing and Yuan Xiaohua's confessions also reflects their strenuous efforts to avoid implicating other innocent individuals through false confessions. I fully understand and am deeply grateful for their intention to protect me.

5. The Indictment states that "Defendant Sun Desheng, along with co-defendants Yuan Bing and others, carried out 'street placard demonstrations' in eight cities pursuant to instructions from Defendant Yang Maodong." The Indictment's use of the term "instructions" clearly aims to establish my primary responsibility, yet this characterization is gravely at odds with the facts. The term "instructions" specifically denotes orders issued by superiors to subordinates within hierarchical structures or authoritarian organizational frameworks. However, the relationship between me, Sun Desheng, and Yuan Bing was not one of organizational subordination but rather a contractual, equal relationship among free individuals. We reached a verbal agreement regarding the "Eight-City Flash Mob" based on shared ideals of freedom and democracy, along with a coordinated operational approach, and subsequently engaged in appropriate division of labor and collaboration. By

common sense, I should bear primary responsibility in this matter. Yet how can formal legal documents articulate this accurately without ambiguity? It appears the drafters of the indictment, lacking familiarity with modern free contractual relationships, failed to grasp the healthy equality among us democratic activists. They misunderstood the essence of cooperative agreements within the flat structure of civil society, rendering them incapable of producing even minimally competent legal language.

As evident above, the indictment—a mere 1,600 words—contains numerous grave legal errors. This not only fully exposes the inherent structural flaws of politically motivated prosecutions but also reveals the true legal competence of both the actual and nominal drafters of the indictment. This also indirectly underscores the critical necessity of the legal reforms, judicial independence, and constitutional democracy championed by us liberal democratic idealists for the people and the nation.

Regarding the indictment's allegation that I "gathered a crowd to disrupt public order in a serious manner" during the "Eight-City Flash Mob" street campaign promoting ratification of the Convention, my formal rebuttal and defense is straightforward:

1. Regarding my personal conduct in this matter, the indictment fails to meet its own claim of "clear facts and solid evidence." For the legal factual statements on this point, please refer to my previously written text; there is no need to torture Yuan Bing and others into retracting their confessions. As for more specific times, locations, and related details, I have no interest in helping you clarify them, as your legal motives are not upright.

2. The "Eight-City Flash Mob" street campaign series seeking ratification of the convention was designed and proposed by me based on my consistent political ideals and operational strategy. After voluntarily agreeing, Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing took charge of execution. The entire process then proceeded and concluded largely as I had envisioned and advised. Therefore, the primary and decisive responsibility for this matter rests with me. The indictment's claim that Sun Desheng was a "ringleader" equal to me in this matter is factually inaccurate.

3. The "Eight-City Flash Mob" street campaign operated according to the internationally recognized park-sidewalk activity model. Its subjective intent was inherently positioned as small-group, advertisement-style street

promotion, not "gathering crowds" for political protest. During actual implementation, no "crowd gathering" occurred in any city. As for "disrupting order," this is entirely fabricated. The indictment claims that the activists' actions "caused crowds to gather and watch in places like Yueyang and Changsha." If the Procuratorate makes such accusations, then you bear the burden of proof. Present photographs from the scenes in Yueyang, Changsha, and other locations, then count on your fingers how many gathered crowds or onlookers appeared at each site. Do the three to five people, or at most seven or eight (some of whom were merely passing by, not gathering or watching), in these photographs meet your established standard for "gathering a crowd"? As for the "disturbance" of public order, where exactly did it occur? Which photograph or video footage can corroborate this? — During the Southern Song Dynasty, Han Shizhong once asked: Did Yue Fei plot rebellion? Qin Hui replied: "It need not be true." — Similarly, in which city and at which location did Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing "disturb" public order during the "Eight-City Flash Mob"? How is this proven?

Regarding the charge of "obstructing police officers in Yueyang," the Yueyang State Security Bureau had taken Sun Desheng, Yuan Bing, and other participants to the police station for questioning. If any participant had seriously obstructed law enforcement, they would have been subject to administrative detention at that time. Did anyone actually receive administrative detention? Furthermore, could this possibly be serious enough to violate criminal law?!

4. As citizens, Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing's demand for the right to walk and stand on sidewalks and in parks—without harming others—is unassailable and beyond question. Building on this foundation, they unfurled banners in vacant areas on sidewalks and in parks promoting two major political themes: "Urging the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" and "Demanding officials disclose their assets." This constitutes the exercise of freedom of speech in public spaces—naturally, this is distinctly different from the "gathering of crowds" associated with exercising the right to assembly, procession, and demonstration in public spaces (regardless of the malicious intent or preconceived notions attached to this particular instance). More

importantly, whether it's the "Eight-City Flash Mob" by Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing—an exercise of free speech in public spaces—or the street protests supporting Southern Weekly—an exercise of the right to assembly, procession, and demonstration in public spaces—both fall under a sidewalk-park activity model. This method of political expression, using sidewalks and parks, is a common practice in civilized nations worldwide and is entirely lawful.

Sidewalks are not critical traffic arteries; they need only remain passable. Parks serve no major function beyond recreation; occupying a corner is sufficient. Citizens exercising political rights like freedom of speech and assembly are a paramount concern for both state and society. The minor negative impact this has on non-critical, non-specialized, non-designated public spaces, such as sidewalks and parks, is tolerable to society. Minor interests can yield to major ones; non-urgent matters can yield to urgent ones—especially when they coexist without conflict! This is precisely why civilized nations worldwide permit citizens to use sidewalks and parks for political expression.

Sun Desheng, Yuan Bing, and others' "Eight-City Flash Mob" street campaign—using sidewalks and parks for political expression—would be viewed in any civilized nation as a lawful exercise of rights, civilized and rational, nothing out of the ordinary. Why, then, does it become "gathering to disrupt public order," "serious circumstances," and "violating criminal law" in China? Faced with identical facts and circumstances, why does China's legal sentencing and measurement become so exaggerated, so elastic, so iron-fisted? Of course, if judges explicitly acknowledge that China implements a legal system with Chinese characteristics, adhering to the practices of relic-level nations like North Korea and Cuba—and dismiss the so-called "international civilized norms" as irrelevant—then I need say no more.

In short, regarding the "Eight-City Flash Mob" street publicity campaign, the "gathering" alleged in the indictment is entirely fabricated, as is the "disturbance." I am completely innocent, and Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing are as well.

The political persecution nature of the charges against Sun Desheng and me in the indictment is undeniable. The International Covenant on Civil

and Political Rights is a fundamental human rights framework established by the United Nations and universally applicable worldwide. Yet Sun Desheng, Yuan Bing, and other citizens were charged with "gathering crowds to disrupt public order in serious circumstances" and face imprisonment simply for holding banners on sidewalks and in parks to urge the National People's Congress to ratify the Covenant, which the State Council had already signed. This reveals the extent of China's anti-democratic forces' fear and hatred toward the "Human Rights Covenant." How truly pitiful, lamentable, and laughably absurd! Your utter lack of shame and thick-skinned audacity could earn you a place in the Guinness World Records.

From north to south, from Ding Jiaxi, Zhao Changqing, and Wang Yonghong to Sun Desheng and Yuan Bing, citizens unfurling banners on sidewalks or in parks demanding "officials disclose their assets" have all become evidence of crimes punishable by imprisonment under Article 291 of the Criminal Law. Under the broad daylight of this vast world, the Chinese path has thus grandly created yet another political miracle for humanity in the age of globalization. If we were to conduct a public opinion poll among ordinary Chinese citizens, asking: "Throughout history, can you find a country more corrupt than China today?" Let us guess: What answer would the people give? All of China is wondering: How many elite families possess fortunes exceeding ten billion yuan? Do you dare disclose this to the people? Why are you so terrified by the call from a dozen citizens demanding "public disclosure of officials' assets"? What magical weapon could possibly silence the voices of hundreds of millions? When this generation of citizens fully awakens and fearlessly stands up to assert their sovereignty, what explanation will you offer them?

In this courtroom today, I am not only defending my own innocence, but also standing for Sun Desheng, Yuan Bing, Yuan Xiaohua, Liu Yuandong, and all citizens who participated in street protests and political assemblies in solidarity with Southern Weekly, as well as those who joined the "Eight-City Flash Mob" street campaign demanding the National People's Congress ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I am defending the political rights of all Chinese citizens. As Chinese citizens, we possess the sacred sovereignty of the people and individual

political sovereignty, including the political rights to assemble, march, and demonstrate that embody this sovereignty. As masters of the political society and masters of this nation, it is entirely natural and absolutely innocent for citizens to exercise their rights as masters in an orderly and lawful manner within a society of masters.

Our actions align with the demands of popular sovereignty and serve the core interests of the Chinese nation—the cause of constitutional democracy. Constitutional democracy embodies universal suffrage, separation of powers, a robust legal system, multiparty democracy, and federalism. It is the tangible manifestation of popular sovereignty, transforming the privatization of power into its public ownership. What kind of person would oppose the movement for freedom, democracy, and constitutional government? What kind of people would view the realization of constitutional democracy—the foremost core interest of the Chinese nation today—as an abyss, as the end of the world? You, the clique representing the fundamental interests of corrupt officials and opposing the public good—the dynastic realm of the Party—can you truly block the surging tide of democracy with violence, fraud, and every form of totalitarian and authoritarian oppression, delaying the Chinese nation's second democratic experiment for decades? We shall see.

Thus concludes my lengthy "Court Defense Statement." Regardless of legal truth, under the post-totalitarian stability maintenance rules, my sentencing is inevitable. I am fully aware of this and accept it calmly. According to the inherent law that a nation thrives through the trials faced by its forces of freedom and democracy, there must always be those who step forward at critical moments—such as during leadership transitions—to resolutely and responsibly launch wave after wave of civic action. These efforts push open wider cracks in the post-totalitarian system’s already creaking gates. When accumulated pressure and collective force reach a certain threshold, those gates will swing wide open. Especially now, as new authoritarian forces attempt to replicate Putin-Lee Kuan Yew-style small-scale, birdcage-style authoritarianism under the banner of "new reforms," further centralizing power and tilting the already unbalanced scales of government versus citizens even more toward the state. At this critical juncture, democratic idealists must summon fundamental moral courage,

proactively and openly stand on the disadvantaged, tilted side of the scale. This will inspire more citizens to awaken and courageously join the ranks of those balancing government power and regulating strongmen. Otherwise, China's future trajectory over the coming decades will be cause for grave concern. In confronting various forms of suppression, challenges, and uncertainties, the promoters of China's constitutional democracy will have the opportunity to demonstrate to the Chinese people our commitment to the rule of law, the limitation of power, universal suffrage, the separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, multiparty competition, the free and equal coexistence of all Chinese ethnic groups, religious freedom, social autonomy, increasing the structural share of civil society sovereignty practices, building an intellectually guided welfare state, and collaborating with Western democratic nations to establish an internationalist—humanitarian——security order. This is the only hope for thoroughly rescuing Chinese society from its deep-seated crises and achieving lasting stability and prosperity through political revolution.

To defend the freedom of speech for all Chinese people, including the editors and journalists of Southern Weekly, and to be imprisoned for pressuring the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights—I truly feel profoundly, profoundly honored. To act in counterbalancing the powerful, to advance the cause of constitutional democracy, and to bear the cost of such action—this is my duty as a veteran democratic fighter with nearly three decades of struggle. I am confident that China's multi-centered, networked opposition movement will weather this wave of suppression, just as it has every time over the past decade, and rise like a tide through the force of Tai Chi push hands. This land has never lacked fearless individuals who shoulder their mission. The future holds profound historical significance.

Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)
November 28, 2014

Final Response in Court

This verdict is unjust and unlawful, a despicable political persecution against Sun Desheng and me orchestrated by China's anti-democratic dark forces. We are entirely innocent.

The depths of law resonate with the voice of sovereignty and dignity. "The most important matters of the law are justice, mercy, and faithfulness." Yet your verdict tramples justice, violates humanity, and undermines fundamental procedural fairness. By fabricating this political injustice against us—who exercised our civic and political rights with integrity—you have perverted the judicial institution, which should uphold justice and safeguard human rights, into a tool for framing innocent citizens, trampling human rights, and undermining the core interest of the Chinese nation: the cause of constitutional democracy. Your criminal intent is blatantly evident, the circumstances exceptionally grave—truly the worst of evils.

Your actions have gravely violated criminal law. In the future era of democratic rule of law, courts will adjudicate your crimes with impartiality, illuminating your humanity—long submerged by savagery, greed, fear, and hatred—with the light of humanity. Without justice and atonement, there can be no dignified mercy or forgiveness.

To all tyrants, oppressors, and anti-democratic forces on Chinese soil, I condemn your souls—poisoned by totalitarian ideology and unrepentant to this day—with the furious prophecy of an unyielding idealist who endured repeated political persecution and torture. After enduring the unspeakable historical tragedies wrought by totalitarianism, you persist in clinging to its legacy, acting against the tide of history, and resorting to any means to preserve the privatization of power and totalitarian rule. I believe that throughout the ages, humanity will condemn your stubborn obstinacy and moral bankruptcy, your shameless self-glorification of savage instincts and political brutality.

"History is our religion." History is the natural law court of our nation. Judges Zheng Xin, Luo Cheng, and Lu Xiao, who presided over this case;

prosecutors Wang Yu and Liu Lijun; and the officials of the stability maintenance apparatus hiding behind you—those who view modern democracy as an abyss—may have acted in secret with guilty consciences, but the divine eye sees all. You will never escape the scourge of the historical court for your profound crimes.

I solemnly declare: Your shameful political persecution will never achieve its goal of suppressing China's surging tide of democracy. On the contrary, it will help the world recognize your anti-democratic essence more clearly. More citizens will rise like mountains, joining our ranks out of anger or awakening. Our freedom and democracy movement will grow ever stronger through relentless suppression and testing, until one day this generation of citizens erects, with their own hands, a constitutional democracy—diverse and balanced—upon this land once ravaged by calamity. The future belongs to sovereign citizens and sovereign people; no nation on earth can evade this destiny.

Here, I extend my sincere gratitude to attorneys Chen Guangwu, Zhang Xuezhong, Zhang Lei, and Li Jinxing, who fearlessly provided me with legal defense over the past two years despite numerous risks and obstacles. Their immense assistance to me defies adequate expression in words. I extend my gratitude to Sui Muqing and Lin Qilei, who have persistently and selflessly dedicated themselves to my rescue and support; to Xiao Shu, Guo Chunping, and Zhao Hongwei; to the revered Pastor Fu Xiqiu and Teacher Zhang Min; and to my sister Yang Maoping and brother Yang Maoquan, whose hearts have endured immense suffering yet grow ever stronger, and growing ever stronger, my sister Yang Maoping and brother Yang Maoquan. My heartfelt thanks also go to the countless fellow rights defenders and freedom advocates who participated in appeals, rescue efforts, and solidarity actions in various ways—too numerous to name individually—as well as to the upright and kind compatriots and international friends who disseminated information, expressed support, and raised protests through diverse channels. The support and assistance from brothers and sisters across the world have made me feel as though I am living in a warm ocean of humanity and compassion, often forgetting the coldness of iron bars and the hardship of thick walls.

I must also express my profound gratitude to my wife, Zhang Qingqing.

In late July 2012, during a dinner with veteran Beijing democracy activists, I was asked about my family situation. I replied: "My feelings for my wife are sacred, for she has tirelessly appealed for my rescue in times of peril and never backed down in the face of threats." My dearest wife, today I publicly declare my profound gratitude to you, intending to express and honor the profound respect I hold for the resilience, steadfastness, and loyalty you have demonstrated over the past decade under extraordinary trials. Especially everything you did for me between September 2006 and December 2008—I will never forget it, and I am eternally grateful." Eternal woman, guiding humanity upward." Dear Madam, I am also deeply aware of the immense hardship you endured as a mother raising two children in a new land. While I was imprisoned repeatedly in my homeland for the cause of democracy, the education of my daughter and son—this family matter I hold most dear—fell entirely upon your shoulders!

Friends, it is time to conclude. I must embrace a new beginning. Boundless legends and opportunities, the brilliance and glory of ideals, await us ahead.

Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)
Posted November 27, 2015

Court Self-Defense Statement in the Illegal Business Operations Case

To ensure that judges who may respect the rule of law, individuals following this case, and future historians understand the legal truth of this matter, I hereby present the following defense:

I. This matter occurred in the summer of 2001. Due to objective circumstances, there is no physical evidence regarding me. The only reliable physical evidence is the two- to three-hundred-word edits and proofreading I made on the printed magazine Shenyang Political Earthquake. This proves I once served as an editor and proofreader for the magazine, a fact I have acknowledged both then and now.

2. My respect for the law is demonstrated by my positive response to credible physical evidence presented by the investigating authorities and the procuratorate. However, in cases where accusations and interrogations lack physical evidence, I exercised my right to self-protection by maintaining a zero-confession stance—a reasonable and lawful act. This constitutes another form of respecting the rule of law.

III. Precisely because I maintained a zero-confession stance during over a hundred interrogations, I was transported to Liaoning Provincial Detention Center and illegally held in secret detention for over two months. This was to subject me to medieval interrogation methods prevalent in Northeast China.

On the evenings of February 12 and March 19, 2007, the Liaoning Provincial Public Security Department's "Special Task Force 1207 led by Tao Zhongge and Yang Naixin, twice subjected me to electric shocks to my male genitals using high-voltage batons and brutally beat me, forcing me to produce two confessions regarding this case. On the afternoon of March 23, the task force issued a preemptive threat against me. On March 24, under the task force's on-site supervision, two officers from the Ninth Division of the Guangzhou Municipal Public Security Bureau—who had traveled from Guangzhou to Shenyang—recorded my confession. This statement was

entirely coerced under the threat of genital electrocution. Legally, it is completely invalid. Its content is a mixture of prompts from the task force, memories from reviewing case files, and past recollections, and does not represent my true recollections. To be precise, given the five to six years that have passed and my change in profession, my recollections of events from the summer of 2001 have grown quite hazy. The statements from over twenty individuals and the magazines presented to me by the investigating unit were entirely new to me.

I certainly remember the appearances of my junior high classmates Jiang Wei and Zhang Zhitao, as well as my former friend Zhou Ya. However, the act of forcing me on March 24th to sign a photocopy of the magazine Shenyang Political Earthquake stating "I have identified this as an illegal publication I published" constitutes fabrication of evidence and is legally invalid.

The three confessions mentioned above were tactical measures taken in a critical moment to protect my core bodily functions from complete destruction. I had personally witnessed the male genitals of a cellmate reduced to a charred black mass by high-voltage electricity. Therefore, my tactical choice was prudent. Hereby, I declare these three confessions null and void.

Previously in Guangzhou, I endured 13 consecutive days and nights of interrogation through "relay questioning." I was shackled to a bed frame by hands and feet for 42 days, subjected to hair-pulling and itching torture for over 20 days. Yet my complaints to judicial authorities remained entirely unanswered.

Any judge with sound reasoning, respect for the rule of law, and professional integrity should recognize the irregularities in the above circumstances and question the validity of the confessions and fabricated evidence.

IV. Legally, the only verifiable material evidence is my editorial proofreading work for the magazine Shenyang Political Earthquake. The nature of this work is partially influenced by the magazine's character, which I shall now analyze.

According to the indictment, the magazine's publication number was "fictitious." If true, this violated the State Administration of Press,

Publication, Radio, Film, and Television's regulations governing ISBNs, publication numbers, and content review. However, no Chinese law grants legal status to the management system for ISBNs, publication numbers, or content review. The Tobacco Monopoly Law governs the tobacco monopoly, but the management of publication numbers is not of a legal nature and therefore cannot substitute for law. It essentially falls into a legal gray area. Using fictitious publication numbers constitutes activity within this legal gray area and does not violate any specific legal provision.

No crime exists without a written law; thus, one may speak of violations but not of illegality. In this era of incomplete transition from a planned to a market economy, many state regulations are erroneous, outdated, and anti-market. Such arbitrary decrees stemming from administrative power cannot be treated as legal authority. Among the myriad harsh and outdated regulations, those governing the news and publishing sectors are particularly chaotic. Take one example: distinguishing between cooperative publishing and disguised book number trading is often difficult. During the mid-1980s, trading book numbers was legal for several years, only to become illegal again in the early 1990s. By the late 1990s, disguised trading of ISBNs became legal in several southern provinces, while it remained illegal in the north. Now, it is legal again in most provinces. Such chaotic "state regulations"—lacking stability, continuity, universality, and equality—possess no authority whatsoever. They run counter to the stable and universal nature required of law and have no right whatsoever to serve as the arbiter distinguishing legality from illegality. No legal provision grants the General Administration of Press and Publication legitimate adjudicative authority. Moreover, the administrative regulations cited by the Administration as grounds for its determination severely violate Article 35 of the Constitution. By extension, the Administration's designation of the magazine as an "illegal publication" holds no legal validity.

The indictment accuses the magazine of "disrupting market order"—yet the ISBN, ISSN, and content censorship systems control not market order, but an anti-market, bill-like planned monopoly order. Their harsh controls severely undermine, restrict, and constrain the constitutionally protected freedom of citizen publishing. They elevate worthless publication numbers into high-priced licenses, essentially bleeding private laborers dry.

Shenyang Political Earthquake magazine disrupted the anti-market, bill-based economic order dominated by ISBNs, ISSNs, and content censorship. It did not interfere with others' normal market operations nor substantially hinder any rational elements of a free market economy. On the contrary, it promoted, propelled, and expanded the emerging market components within the publishing sector. Therefore, it is not a criminal against market order but a contributor to it. Article 225 of the Criminal Law does not apply to any participant in the Shenyang Political Earthquake magazine.

Incidentally, the indictment's use of both "fabrication" and "misappropriation" to describe the same act is clearly contradictory. If it is "fabrication," then it is not "misappropriation"—it would be an unintentional collision. If it is "misappropriation," then there is no need for "fabrication." The simultaneous presence of both terms in the indictment is absurd.

In summary, Shenyang Political Earthquake Magazine operated within a legal gray area. Its content aimed to promote anti-corruption principles, expose corrupt forces, break down information barriers, and advance publishing freedom—without causing any societal harm. No one involved in the magazine's work—including editors, proofreaders, or others—violated Article 225 of the Criminal Law.

I am innocent. Neither eternal history nor current law provides sufficient material evidence or appropriate legal provisions to convict me. Bringing me to this court and sentencing me to severe punishment based on convictions derived from expert opinions issued under the guise of "substituting power for law," or through confessions extracted by torture and high-voltage electric shocks to vital body parts, is not a dignified act that respects the rule of law.

Final Statement in the Court of the Illegal Business Operations Case

Over the past ten months in detention, I endured a series of extraordinary treatments: 13 consecutive days and nights of relentless interrogation ("wheel-war tactics"), 42 days shackled to a bed frame with my hands and feet bound, over 100 days in leg irons, and over 20 days of continuous humiliation by officers like Luo Weiguo from the Ninth Division of the Guangzhou Public Security Bureau, who pulled my hair, and subjected to continuous humiliation involving itching for over 20 days. Officers Tao Zhongge and Yang Naixin from Liaoning Provincial Public Security Department's 1207 Task Force administered electric shocks to my genitals and beat me twice...This relentless escalation of inhumane treatment—inflicted upon me, a suspect merely accused of illegal business operations involving over 200,000 yuan—reveals not only the attitude toward law and morality held by the investigating units and judicial authorities who ignored my repeated complaints, but also indicates the investigators' intentions were far from straightforward.

During the 175 interrogations I endured, approximately 90% focused on unrelated rights defense cases like the Taishi officials' resignation protest. Investigators explicitly stated multiple times that they had framed me with the illegal business operation charge and subjected me to various forms of torture to extract confessions—all aimed at halting my advocacy for freedom and democracy and breaking my will.

The political nature of this persecution is glaringly obvious. Nevertheless, I must still present my account of the economic case itself.

This case originated in the summer of 2001. Due to objective circumstances, very little physical evidence directly linked to me remains. The sole reliable physical evidence consists of two to three hundred words of edits and proofreading I made on the printed manuscript of Shenyang Political Earthquake. This proves I served as an editor and proofreader for this magazine—a fact I have acknowledged both then and now.

To make a legally relevant judgment on the nature of my editing and proofreading work, as evidenced by this sole reliable physical evidence, one must inevitably address how the magazine "Shenyang Political Earthquake" itself is characterized. Therefore, I must provide some explanation regarding this publication.

The Shenyang Political Earthquake was formally designated as an illegal publication by the General Administration of Press and Publication. However, this designation itself lacks legal legitimacy. Its preemptive determination of a product's illegality before court proceedings commenced reveals the existence of a force that precedes and supersedes the law—perhaps termed a "pre-legal law." Yet no legal provision grants the General Administration this super-judicial authority, rendering the designation absurd.

Substantively, the SPPA based its determination on various regulations or rules it had formulated regarding news and publication management. These regulations or rules lack a credible source of legitimacy, essentially reflecting the boundless monopolistic will of administrative power. As is widely known, the content of these regulations does not safeguard publishing freedom but rather undermines, restricts, and suppresses it. Therefore, it would be more accurate to call them anti-publishing freedom regulations. The administrative power embodied by these regulations, along with the totalitarian system they conceal, has created a distorted economic order within the publishing sector—one characterized by harsh control, extreme monopolization, rigid hierarchies, and pervasive discrimination. This system has stripped the Chinese people of most of their rights to publish books and periodicals freely, shrinking it to the size of a thin wooden board. It forces people in the information age to use ISBNs and ISSNs like they used ration tickets for cloth, matches, and bicycles in the 1950s and 1960s—only many times more oppressive. This voucher-based economic order is anything but a market system. Under its authoritarian control, people are shackled and fettered at every turn. Over the past decade, my colleagues and I have endured relentless torment from these ISBNs, ISSNs, and draconian content censorship regulations—suffering beyond description, which need not be elaborated here.

According to the fundamental civilized norms of contemporary human

society, all people are born free and enjoy freedom of thought, speech, publication, and association. Among these, freedom of publication is a primary, foundational, and pioneering human and legal right. Even our nation's constitution—which itself requires significant reform—cannot deny this truth. Clearly, the regulations and decrees of the General Administration of Press and Publication violate Article 35 of the Constitution and contravene the higher natural law, the justice of nature itself. They should be the very targets of reform, not the arbiters of what is lawful or unlawful!

In an era of reform, it is not that "what exists is reasonable," but rather that "what is reasonable must exist." The reform history of the past 30 years is precisely a history of practitioners continuously breaking through various harsh controls to advance toward freedom. The household responsibility system in Xiaogang Village, Anhui; private enterprises in Wenzhou; and foreign investment in Guangdong are all famous examples. Countless grassroots citizens, driven by survival needs and a yearning for freedom, boldly breached the taboos of totalitarianism and strict control, enduring severe suppression and sacrifice. Gradually, imitators and followers multiplied, coalescing into a mighty river. The ruling elite above were compelled to adapt, and through the combined force, reforms and breakthroughs were ultimately achieved in specific domains.

Those involved in the Shenyang Political Earthquake—whether deeply or superficially engaged—clearly recognized that their actions, like those of Xiaogang Village farmers, were pioneering efforts for press and publishing reform. They felt no guilt at the time.

We know that when Gandhi led the people in forcibly producing salt on the beach, it was to break the unjust laws imposed by British colonizers that prohibited Indians from producing salt. The civil rights movement, spearheaded by Martin Luther King Jr. and others, which challenged the segregation of buses into separate sections for blacks and whites, aimed to break through the unjust laws of racial discrimination. To equate participation in editing, proofreading, or publishing the Shenyang Political Earthquake with challenging unjust laws and practicing justice is inaccurate. This is because, within the core domain of publishing—the tightly regulated system comprising ISBNs, ISSNs, and content censorship—no legal framework exists to govern it. The will of administrative power itself is not

law; no legal provision or judicial interpretation can confer legal status, legal rights, or the authority to adjudicate legitimacy upon ISBNs, ISSNs, or content censorship. Thus, this core realm of strict regulation—dominated by ISBNs, ISSNs, and content censorship—is effectively a legal vacuum. The act of "fabricating" a periodical number without publishing permission, as alleged in the indictment, is essentially operating freely within this legal vacuum. It breaches the boundaries of strict regulation but does not violate any legal provision—indeed, not even an unjust law exists here! No crime exists without a clear legal provision. The correct designation for Shenyang Political Earthquake is not an illegal publication, but a black book—a colloquial term that aptly captures its nature. Under the harsh regulatory regime, it is black; yet in a free market system, it could easily become white—as exemplified by the Hong Kong region within China, where ISBNs and ISSNs are registered on demand, stored for future use, and subject to no prior content review.

If someone were to ask, what were the objectives of those involved in the Shenyang Political Earthquake magazine? I can honestly say their goal is to use this magazine to promote the righteous spirit of anti-corruption efforts within the system and among the people, to expose the corrupt practices of officials like Mu Suixin and Ma Xiangdong, and to break through the information blockade on this sensitive news. Their goal is to earn legitimate commercial profits through their own labor without infringing on others' rights. They also pursued a long-term, deep-seated, and continuous objective: to foster the emergence of a self-sustaining free publishing market through concrete commercial activities. This was not merely for individual gain, but to secure publishing freedom for an entire generation.

At that point, the "second channel" would become the "first channel"; the underground would rise above ground, the black would be restored to white, and slaves would leap to become masters. This is a true recollection—the participants at the time possessed remarkably clear and lofty ambitions. They planned to proceed in stages: first, concrete operational practices; then, public advocacy; followed by lobbying outside the People's Congress compound. Their aim was to vigorously promote the rise of reformist thought in the field of news and publishing, harnessing collective wisdom to transform the ticket economy order under harsh control into a free market

order safeguarded by the rule of law.If realized, this reform would create millions of new jobs for this populous nation, unleashing the long-suppressed free thought and creativity of hundreds of millions of people. Only then would this country truly enter the information age and step into a civilized society. Such a feat, of course, could not be achieved by one person alone but required the concerted effort of a generation. Yet the participants still hoped to claim the glory of being explorers, pioneers, and drivers of change. Naturally, this also aligns with their legitimate personal interests.

Here, I must state unequivocally that the indictment's allegation that publishing the journal Shenyang Political Earthquake violated Article 225 of the Criminal Law is entirely unfounded. "Violating state regulations"—state regulations do not equate to law. In this era of reform, transitioning from totalitarianism and strict control toward freedom and the rule of law, many "state regulations" imposing strict controls are erroneous, illegal, and should be overcome. The core issue, of course, is the phrase "disrupting market order." As I stated earlier, in a precise and nuanced sense, today's publishing sector does not operate under a market economy but under a ticket economy governed by harsh controls. The Shenyang Political Earthquake disrupted the anti-market ticket economy order dominated by ISBNs, ISSNs, and content censorship.It did not impede others' normal market operations nor substantially disrupt any rational elements of a free market economy. On the contrary, it promoted, propelled, and expanded the emerging market components within the publishing sphere. Thus, it is not a villain of market order but a champion of it. Article 225 of the Criminal Law does not apply to any participant in the Shenyang Political Earthquake magazine. Should charges be brought against them, a separate legal provision must be selected.

At this point, it is necessary to briefly clarify the key concepts used earlier. The "freedom of publication" pursued by the participants refers not only to the spiritual freedom of expression but also to the material freedom of economic action. It constitutes part of the broadest and most fundamental freedoms. It is not only a basic right of the intellectual class but also a fundamental right of the broad masses of the working people. Within the publishing sphere, my own role extends beyond that of an intellectual to encompass that of a grassroots laborer—a long-term practitioner deeply engaged in concrete operations and repeatedly subjected to suppression. Like

the vast majority of workers in this field, I have long poured my intellect and sweat into this domain, striving for survival and laboring for dreams. I empathize profoundly with them, having heard their heartfelt cries. Across this nation, in every corner of this land, I have heard their persistent pleas. They say: "Like people in other countries, we Chinese should have the right to freely publish books, newspapers, and periodicals. No one has the right to deprive us of our legitimate rights!" They also say: "We will not sit idly by and wait for death. Let those unreasonable rules and regulations suffocate us to death!"

It is widely known that this fervent, instinctive cry for freedom resonates not only in publishing but across countless sectors of Chinese society. If we bend down to listen closely to the earth, we can feel the surging tide of over a billion people yearning for liberty and democracy.

Standing at this unique podium, I speak not only to you but to history itself. Looking back, I take pride in having contributed to the magazine Shenyang Political Earthquake. I take pride in having once stood among the pioneers advancing publishing freedom. I take pride in conveying the people's cry for liberty across diverse platforms—including this extraordinary stage today.

I declare openly and with conviction: I am innocent. Not only in the eyes of eternal history, but also under today's laws, I am innocent. No credible physical evidence or legal provisions can prove my guilt. I am not a criminal violating Article 225 of the Criminal Law; I am a champion who has advanced freedom, reform, and marketization. History will prove that the persecution, torment, and imprisonment I have endured for this case—past, present, and future—are worthwhile.

I believe that through active transformation, passive change, or other forms of evolution, this generation of Chinese people will inevitably break free from their chains. They will trample underfoot the unjust rules that defy nature and violate the fundamental principles of human civilization. They will decisively secure freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and other basic democratic rights. Thus, they will rise from enslaved commoners to become the true masters of this land. At this moment, history descends upon this generation, with boundless legend awaiting ahead.

July 9, 2007

Part Two

Constitutional Commentary

Foreword to Chinese Intellectuals of Conscience Discuss Constitutional Democracy

The surging public sentiment triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that China has reached a critical juncture where change is imperative—a juncture demanding the thorough transformation of its pre-modern political system.

Standing at this historical threshold, we should reflect on the past and look to the future with foresight. Over the past 110 years, the Chinese nation established Asia's first democratic republic. Ultimately, due to various reasons, it proved unable to address internal and external crises, leading to the failure of this first democratic experiment. Since 1978, through decades of layered ideological advancement, a new generation of freedom-minded idealists has gradually approached the essence of humanity's political civilization and universal political truths: the institutional framework of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—constitutional democracy. In today's mainland China, constitutional democracy stands as one of the most resonant and influential political currents. The turbulent currents of the present era seem to signal that the second democratic endeavor of the Chinese nation—particularly the historic opportunity to implement constitutional democracy—is quietly approaching within a generation.

But what is the core essence of constitutional democracy? Is it feasible on Chinese soil? How can it be implemented to adapt to China's unique constraints, overcome major challenges, truly realize the values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, establish a pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy, and minimize the costs while maximizing the effectiveness of political transformation?

This question stands as the foremost political issue facing China today.

Objectively and dispassionately speaking, many liberal thinkers and activists appear to have yet to offer a systematic, profound, substantive, and practical exploration or answers to this paramount political question. For an

entire generation, the direction of transformation is largely clear, yet the blueprint for the political system to be achieved remains unclear. Confusion and vacillation in political concepts are evident even among those most committed to the cause. This intellectual void harbors grave concerns, for political transformation resembles a collective migration of the entire nation—a process of immense scope and cost that cannot afford the price of "crossing the river by feeling the stones," or of repeatedly floundering and experimenting in the river's currents. The painful lessons from the first democratic experiment, marked by constant shifts in the political framework, remain starkly evident!

Embracing and navigating the second phase of this "unprecedented transformation in three millennia" demands a composure and foresight commensurate with its magnitude. It requires deliberate planning before action, ensuring that the fundamental political question outlined above is thoroughly understood and articulated from the outset. This clarity will facilitate the consolidation of a national political consensus and the establishment of a foundational constitution. As proponents of moderate reform, we intend to begin this endeavor through intellectual and academic discourse.

Academic discourse is an independent intellectual and cultural endeavor, serving as the vanguard of a nation's thought and the origin point for building future societies. Constructing China's future political system requires both the integration of experience and profound theoretical and operational rationality, demanding rigorous argumentation and meticulous design. Both dimensions await the pioneering exploration and mature crystallization of intellectual scholarship.

To this end, we have launched the questionnaire "China's Conscientious Intellectuals Discuss Constitutional Democracy."

The questionnaire's core purpose is to explore "how China's future national institutional model should be constructed"—that is, how constitutional democracy should be built in China's future, what structural frameworks and value realization methods should be selected and established at each fundamental juncture, and the underlying rationale for these choices. While political transformation involves complex "Day One" negotiations, this questionnaire focuses on the "Day Two" task of institutional construction after negotiations conclude—a matter of national

significance. Adopting this detached stance serves not only to avoid interference with current affairs but, more importantly, to directly address the implementation methods and institutional blueprints of political ideals, penetrating to the essence of political phenomena and the deep structures of politics.

Political theory has long faced persistent inquiries and skepticism regarding its "practical applicability." Our approach addresses this by designing the questionnaire entirely around the core question of "how to implement it in reality," making this the starting point for fundamental theoretical exploration. The questionnaire, comprising 36 questions on fundamental pathways for institutional construction and value realization, broadly outlines the problem tree of China's "primary political question." Each participant may selectively address this problem tree—expanding or condensing their responses—yet do so in a way that fundamentally reveals their systematic conception for future constitutional democracy and the realization of universal values. The questionnaire's underlying logic particularly emphasizes practical operation and applied scholarship over idle discourse. We anticipate that the diverse, profound, and substantial cluster of institutional blueprint concepts presented in the responses from several constitutional thinkers will, in a sense, foster an "intellectual climate" that powerfully propels the historical transformation of academic trends within the free-thinking community—shifting from idle discourse to applied scholarship.

The questionnaire's primary feature is the systematic exploration of institutional operations.

The second major feature is its emphasis on professionalism. The questionnaire poses challenging questions in highly specialized domains, requiring substantial knowledge reserves and years of professional experience to track information to address them. In this era of specialization, cutting-edge political institutional blueprinting must embody the advanced expertise of political science, reflecting the theoretical depth and academic rigor accumulated by domestic thinkers over decades. The questionnaire calls on experts to engage in thoughtful deliberation and develop solutions to China's "primary political question." Yet experts and thoughtful contributors are not confined to professional political scientists. The questionnaire calls for numerous "passionate individuals" and independent

thinkers across disciplines to emerge, boldly engage, and traverse diverse theoretical domains. This will create depth rather than linearity, offering multidimensional, distinctive, and exceptional new blueprints for China's future political system design.

Above all, the questionnaire calls for originality. Observers who have long tracked the trajectory of Chinese academic thought note that many outstanding scholars possess both the capacity and talent for original work, yet have long been deterred from attempting it. Overwhelmed by the towering peaks of modern and contemporary thought, they have collectively "accumulated timidity and mediocrity," ultimately losing not only their capacity for originality but even the impulse to pursue it. We believe that courage often liberates wisdom. The questionnaire frequently requires respondents to "explain your reasoning," essentially urging them to articulate their arguments with greater depth and philosophical rigor. We earnestly anticipate respondents embracing the innocent spirit of free thought, radiating natural theoretical courage, consistently transcending authoritative hypotheses, probing the foundations of institutions and the principles of liberty, boldly experimenting at every turn, and independently distilling political, sociological, and philosophical principles. This process should ultimately lead them back to questioning the fundamental origins of the operating system, political theory, and philosophical essence trees. We even assert that such attempts at reflection, critique, and principle refinement—pointing toward these fundamental origins—will inevitably enhance respondents' theoretical courage and cultivate their capacity for originality.

The third defining feature of the questionnaire is the openness of its answers. Pluralistic inclusivity is the very essence of constitutional democracy. The questionnaire design on constitutional democracy eagerly anticipates respondents offering diverse, richly individualized, or creative expressions. The more distinctive and well-grounded the ideas, the more they enrich the public academic platform's gene pool. The myriad branches of the question tree concerning China's "primary political issue" inherently lack standard answers, instead opening toward multiple possibilities. The various political checks-and-balances combinations and operational pathways they point toward remain open to trial-and-error in the future, capable of being experimentally verified or disproven. For the institutional design movement, the profound reflection sparked by these questions holds greater significance

than merely finding "correct answers." We also hope the dissemination and critique of responses will stimulate serious contemplation and exploration among more like-minded individuals. Logically, the questionnaire can be viewed as "an examination for a generation." An entire generation can use this questionnaire—or more sophisticated designs like it—to test one another, thereby passionately engaging in the historic movement to design a political system and draft a constitution for all citizens. Those with ambition can also use it to reflect on whether they have accumulated sufficient intellectual resources and practical training to consciously step through history's new threshold as subjects.

The fourth defining feature of the questionnaire is its emphasis on conscience. It not only explores how institutional frameworks should be constructed but also integrates the realization of first-generation and second-generation human rights as a core structural element. This reveals our novel interpretation of constitutional democracy, particularly highlighting our paramount reverence for meta-values and the meta-constitution. This represents the deepest theoretical conscience. The questionnaire consistently evaluates the adaptability of the entire nation, concerns itself with the practical feasibility of ideal systems under various constraints, and is permeated with a sincere and profound care for our compatriots, our nation, our culture, and our land. This is an emotionally resonant moral conscience. The questionnaire further calls upon respondents to employ their conscience to articulate genuine ideas, ideals, and practical approaches—that is, the idealistic endeavors and practical paths they are willing to stake the vast majority of their personal resources, even their lives, upon. At this historical juncture marked by both high-pressure suppression and resistance, the very act of publicly voicing calls for an ideal political system and constitutional democracy testifies to the conscience of those who respond.

Participating in the arduous, pioneering task of shaping a political starting point is an exhilarating intellectual and academic endeavor. We earnestly hope that free-thinking individuals dedicated to constitutional design and institutional practice will, through their responses, demonstrate the depth, substance, originality, and novelty of their ideas. What the hand writes is what the heart feels, and the heart is inherently guided by conscience. Ideas thrive on confrontation, and mutual understanding brings rich rewards. Let us encourage one another with this spirit as we collectively

confront the mighty waves of history's Three Gorges.

The Theoretical Breakthrough and Operational Wisdom of "Constitutional Centrism"

—Review of Xiao Shu's Response Paper: "China's Conscientious Intellectuals on Constitutional Democracy"

Neither excessive nor deficient embodies the classical Doctrine of the Mean. Various forms of equilibrium represent the Doctrine of the Mean in the modern era.

The "Constitutional Middle Path" theory articulated by Xiao Shu in his response paper has genuinely attained the "modernity" of the Doctrine of the Mean, as well as the "modernity" of empirical political theory. His meticulous pursuit of balance between progressiveness and conservatism bears witness to the benevolent depth and far-sightedness of a liberal idealist long committed to moderate transformation.

I. The Passive and Active Aspects of Power Balancing

"The equilibrium of the political ecosystem is the paramount task of a nation's governance." This constitutes the primary assertion of Xiao Shu's constitutional democracy theory and serves as its fundamental logical premise. Within this framework, "the equilibrium of the political ecosystem" stands as the core concept of the theory. It offers an innovative new interpretation of the standard for the legitimacy of a nation's political power: political power must not only originate from and serve the people, but also achieve and maintain "equilibrium" within and beyond the power ecosystem.

In his response to the "Chinese Intellectuals on Constitutional Democracy" questionnaire, Xiao Shu outlined three dimensions of political equilibrium: First, horizontal checks and balances within the power system; second, vertical separation of powers—specifically federalism—establishing equilibrium between central and local governments, and among local entities; third, equilibrium between the power system and other societal systems, or between the state and society.

Xiao Shu contends that constitutional democracy encompasses multiple elements, such as constitutionalism, the rule of law, separation of

powers, democracy, and local autonomy. "But among all these elements, I believe the most crucial is the separation of powers and checks and balances."The essence of separation of powers and checks and balances lies in constraining power through the division of power, thereby achieving equilibrium in the political ecosystem." Power restraining power not only 'passively' curbs abuse but also 'actively' safeguards the internal equilibrium, stability, and orderly functioning of the power system itself. This represents the substantive political philosophical innovation Xiao Shu has uncovered within the consensus on the separation of powers theory.

In contrast to decentralized checks and balances, unrestrained power—highly centralized, infinitely concentrated, or totalitarian—is succinctly termed by Xiao Shu as "one-power dominance." He asserts, "One-power dominance is dinosaur politics. As we all know, a single dominant dinosaur inevitably disrupts ecological equilibrium... and proves tragic for the dinosaur itself." The dinosaur's massive body prevents it from adapting to environmental changes. Highly concentrated power creates a single-source authority within the entire political system. Should this singular center falter, correction becomes exceedingly difficult. If subjected to a devastating external blow, the political system risks paralysis, disintegration, or even severe societal devastation.

The greatest contribution of decentralized checks and balances lies in its ability to effectively prevent the internal instability and external vulnerability caused by centralized power. The multi-centered, pluralistic nature of politics under this structure—where multiple power centers (such as the executive, parliament, or supreme court) mutually constrain each other and engage in invisible yet constructive competition—endows the political system with robust internal adaptability, external resilience, and a deep capacity to withstand pressure."Unlike the exclusionary politics of dinosaurs, it is a balanced political system characterized by pluralistic coexistence and mutual prosperity." Therefore, "separation of powers and checks and balances most align with ecological principles, which are quintessential expressions of natural law."

In Xiao Shu's view, "the most classic form of separation of powers is the tripartite division of powers. This is the golden rule of modern political civilization: adding to it makes it bloated, while subtracting from it makes it emaciated. An example of bloating is the so-called five-power constitution

advocated by Dr. Sun Yat-sen. The two powers deliberately added by Dr. Sun beyond the three branches—the power of examination and the power of supervision—were undoubtedly the useless appendages of the Republic of China's constitutional system. In today's Taiwan, they have found themselves in an extremely awkward predicament. As for the consequences of reduction, they are attested to by too many instances of one power becoming overly dominant." This is indeed a strikingly sharp and remarkably concise assertion: the golden rule does not permit useless appendages! For those institutional designers who passionately pursue novelty without theoretical grounding, this statement serves as a powerful reminder.

II. The Flexibility, Adaptability, and Prudent Implementation of Federalism

Regarding vertical power relations, Xiao Shu forcefully affirms the legitimacy and necessity of federalism. "As a super-sized nation with vast territory and population, China's complexity is unparalleled globally. An overly rigid unitary system is fundamentally incapable of managing it." The deeply entrenched problems in China's central-local relations today, along with the near-total loss of local culture and vitality, stem precisely from this centralized unitary system. "To fundamentally resolve these issues, we must first acknowledge the political reality of China as a super-sized nation and a super-complex system. This necessitates moving beyond the unitary system toward a more flexible and resilient federal system."

Under federalism, both the central and local governments derive their authority independently through democratic electoral processes. There is no direct hierarchical relationship between them; instead, they engage in decentralized governance and cooperation through policies (standardized in the form of administrative decrees) and laws. Should conflicts of authority arise, they can ultimately be resolved through legal procedures. Thus, their power relationship is "more flexible and adaptable," representing a balanced political ecosystem between central and local authorities. Within federalism, numerous democratic autonomous units—each possessing distinct natural endowments, economies, cultures, and ethnicities—are distributed across a vast territory. No single local power can grow strong enough to manipulate the entire system. "Public morality" thus becomes the greatest common denominator among all autonomous units and the entire populace,

representing a political equilibrium between localities.

Federalism stands as the logical antithesis to centralization, offering the fundamental solution to China's millennia-old ills of centralized governance. While Xiao Shu highly affirms the political truth of federalism, he also earnestly insists that political truth must fully account for local adaptability. "Federalism is the ideal goal, the ultimate objective. Progress toward this goal should be a gradual process, with different regions and ethnic groups having distinct timetables and roadmaps." His reasoning is that "the deep resentment accumulated among regions and ethnic groups under long-term, highly centralized colonial rule is another political reality we cannot ignore."

Some liberal scholars advocating federalism believe that conflicts and ethnic tensions in China's border regions can be largely resolved through safeguarding basic human rights and implementing religious freedom once democracy is achieved. This represents an extremely naive fantasy, stemming from insufficient information about the harsh realities in border areas and a lack of profound understanding of cultural and psychological differences among human groups. Among liberal scholars and intellectuals, Xiaoshu stands out as a rare, highly lucid realist. He sharply points out: "The consequences and costs of a split rooted in deep-seated resentment accumulated between regions and ethnic groups would likely be unimaginable to us today. For the welfare of the vast majority of our compatriots, this is precisely what we must consider how to resolutely avoid today."

So how can this be avoided? Xiao Shu proposes a pragmatic approach: steady, incremental progress, never seeking overnight transformation. "Gradualism—achieved in phases and regions—is a viable option. Only through gradualism—achieved in phases and across regions—can a buffer period be created. With such a buffer, transitional justice can be advanced. Only through transitional justice can people emerge from the deep-seated resentments accumulated between regions and ethnic groups, and only then can they avoid being hijacked by passion and impulse. Not only does transitional justice require time, but truth and reconciliation require time, and the maturation of a constitutional democratic system also requires time."

Mastering the strategic rhythm of advancing federalism is not merely a matter of operational convenience. In Xiao Shu's incisive theoretical perspective, it is also a matter of principle—one that concerns the "balance

between separation and union." This essentially constitutes one of the core elements of "political equilibrium between the central and local governments.""How to divide, how to unite, and how to balance division and unity—these are monumental decisions affecting the fate of 1.4 billion people. ... Only under a mature constitutional democratic system can such decisions be made correctly and wisely." Otherwise, high costs are difficult to avoid.

Xiao Shu concludes that the flexibility and adaptability of federalism "cannot be confined to the ultimate goal; the process of advancing toward that goal also requires flexibility and adaptability."This prudent consideration bears witness to the great love, responsibility, and far-sightedness of the idealist of freedom. For the fundamental interests of 1.4 billion compatriots, in advancing the process of federalism, we must seek a balance between the pioneering nature of the ideal and the gradual nature of its implementation—Xiao Shu stands as the foremost voice in China's liberal intellectual circles to issue this profound, wise, and resolute call.

III. Social Checks on the State and Their Philosophical Foundations

In the debate over whether China should adopt a presidential or parliamentary system, Xiao Shu leans toward the former. "Given the complexity of China's national conditions, particularly the intricacies of political transition, a strong government is essential. A government too weak would be ill-equipped to navigate the turbulent currents of the future." He elaborates: "The strong government I advocate is primarily one that delivers robust public services—professional, efficient, and impactful."A strong government is neither inherently right nor wrong; the crucial question is whether its power is fully constrained by constitutional boundaries and whether it is restrained by the constitutional bridle."

Who will place constitutional restraints on a strong government? "Only a more robust civil society possesses the sufficient momentum and capacity to impose such restraints; only a more robust civil society has the sufficient momentum and capacity to hold the government accountable for its public services, exerting irresistible pressure to compel continuous improvement in the quality of public services, driving them toward professionalism, efficiency, and effectiveness. Without a strong civil society, none of this is

possible."

Putting the government on a leash means balancing the state through society—it is essentially the equilibrium of the political ecosystem between the state and society. In Xiao Shu's view, checks and balances should occur not only between different branches of power but also between society and the entire power system. Separation of powers represents horizontal checks, while federalism embodies vertical checks. Both ultimately lead to societal checks, as federalism's essence lies in local autonomy. "Local autonomy means returning power to the people—not to atomized individuals, but to organized civil society, especially grassroots community organizations. In this sense, social autonomy, particularly community autonomy, is not only inherent to local autonomy but should be its core element." Xiao Shu specifically emphasized that what he "most wishes to stress is social development, is civil society. Atomized individuals lack power. With only atomized individuals, 1.4 billion people will forever remain a scattered mass. They must organize themselves. Only through social movements—especially civic-based, localized social movements—can citizens freely unite and advance the entire society's organizational process. Only then can the collective power of citizens constrain public authority and maximize the protection of freedom."

Free and sovereign individuals (in Lockean terms) unite through civil society and social movements—not through hierarchical power structures—to form a civil political society distinct from the state. This constitutes a counterbalance to public power. Thus, free and sovereign individuals actively realize and fully embody their essential "social nature," "political nature," and "political sovereignty."This constitutes the essence of popular sovereignty and the core of social life under constitutional democracy. Xiao Shu's core argument transcends the theme of "social-state equilibrium," reaching the very essence of constitutional democracy and standing at the foundational source of political philosophy. Xiao Shu's masterful articulation of three key tenets—the "de-atomized individual," the "realization of citizens' free association," and the "constraint of public power through collective citizen force to maximize freedom protection" (balancing power with power)—sufficiently demonstrates that his constitutional democracy theory has attained a certain level of political philosophical sophistication.

After constitutional democracy is realized in China, a strong society

will counterbalance a strong state, achieving an effective equilibrium. But does society itself require internal checks and balances? On this point, Xiao Shu has addressed one key theme: in future China, safeguarding freedom of speech and the press must ensure they are "not only free from government interference and manipulation, but also from capital's interference and manipulation... Guarding against the erosion of justice in speech and press freedom by capital manipulation and comprehensive marketization/commodification is a structural consideration for ensuring the healthy development of civil society and the equilibrium of the political-social ecosystem."This is insightful, yet the question of how to achieve ecological equilibrium between societies remains absent from his primary theoretical framework. Furthermore, the issue of political equilibrium fostered by multiparty or two-party systems within civil political societies and power structures is regrettably overlooked. This may be an area Xiao Shu's constitutional doctrine needs to address in the future.

IV. The Value, Rationality, and Operational Rationality of "Constitutional Centrism"

Adhering to an independent civil stance and spirit of rational critique, Xiao Shu offers a sober and profound analysis of totalitarian politics—the antithesis of constitutional democracy—in his response. Grounded in fairness and justice, he asserts that he opposes not any specific party's peaceful and lawful competition for governance through constitutional procedures, but rather "a party-state system that usurps popular sovereignty, elevating the party above the nation and society. This party-state system is a classic example of dinosaur politics." "...The greatest original sin of dinosaur politics is the corruption of the political and social ecosystem. When this ecosystem becomes unbalanced, and power concentrates at one end, those in power inevitably become corrupted. When power becomes supremely arrogant, it loses all sense of political restraint." Unchecked, absolute power leads to extreme overreach and abuse, driving increasingly radical behavior: "There are no boundaries to what can be done; every means is justified; success brings prosperity, failure brings ruin." Thus, dinosaur politics of absolute power is extreme politics.

Xiao Shu argues that China's greatest political problem lies in the prolonged imbalance of its political-social ecosystem—extreme politics.

"The Chinese people have long endured the hardships of political upheavals, the turmoil of constant turmoil, and above all, the suffering of extreme dinosaur politics. China's political landscape urgently needs to return to the middle path, to a balanced ecosystem. Only constitutional government, with separation of powers and checks and balances, represents the ultimate middle path. Without separation of powers, the political-social ecosystem cannot be transformed; without checks and balances, the abuse of power cannot be restrained; without constitutional government, society cannot be safeguarded and restored to basic tranquility."A balanced ecosystem, through the powerful and effective interactions and mutual restraints among its major variables, curbs the tendency of any single variable to drift toward extremes, thereby achieving grand moderation—a macro-level middle path. Here, Xiaoshu explicitly defines the 'balanced ecosystem' as the 'middle path.' This constitutes the core definition of Xiaoshu's constitutional theory and stands as clear testimony to his attainment of the 'modernity' of the Doctrine of the Mean."

Xiao Shu further interprets the essence of constitutionalism as the "Middle Way," while also understanding it as the core essence of political natural law, heavenly principle, and public justice. "China, long tormented by extremes, most urgently lacks the Middle Way. Constitutionalism is the ultimate Middle Way, closest to political natural law, most aligned with heavenly principle, and the greatest public justice. Returning to constitutionalism means not only returning to the Middle Way, but also returning to public justice."

Thus, Xiao Shu's theoretical framework for constitutionalism as the Middle Way is largely established. Grounded in political natural law and Heavenly Principle, it opposes extreme politics and advocates a return to the Middle Way as its overarching principle. Within this framework, the first tenet is to stand on the foundation of democracy and oppose the extremes of totalitarian autocracy. The second tenet is to stand on the foundation of democracy and seek to restrain the extremes inherent in democracy itself, as well as in democratic movements and processes. Xiao Shu's profound insights—such as the need to balance the idealistic, forward-looking nature of advancing federalism with the practical, gradualist approach to its implementation—reveal his efforts to seek the middle path within the democratic framework. This approach enables the theory of constitutional

moderation to avoid the self-contradictory dilemmas common to many doctrines, achieving logical reflexivity, coherence, and universal thoroughness.

It is particularly important to emphasize that the core of Xiao Shu's constitutional middle-way theory lies in "using the middle way to oppose extremism, primarily opposing extreme systems—that is, totalitarian systems. Totalitarianism is the greatest and most terrifying form of extremism." For a long time, Chinese liberal democratic idealists have been slandered by their ideological opponents as "extremists," "radicals," and "radicals." Through systematic and profound theoretical analysis, Xiao Shu unequivocally asserts: "The totalitarian system is an extreme system incapable of achieving the Middle Way or pluralistic equilibrium; all totalitarians are extremists. We, however, are the true upholders of the Middle Way." Xiao Shu's lucid resolution of this critical issue rectifies longstanding misconceptions and carries profound significance.

Montesquieu once observed, "Politics is a blunt file that gradually achieves its purpose without being noticed. Therefore, a nation should be governed not by extremes but by the middle way." His seminal work, The Spirit of the Laws, and his pioneering doctrine of the separation of powers already contained the modern concept of pluralistic equilibrium—the middle way. By proposing his theory of the constitutional middle way, Xiao Shu explicitly articulates this profound essence. Looking back at the classical Chinese concept of the Doctrine of the Mean, we see that "middle" signifies impartiality—neither excessive nor deficient—while "mean" denotes constancy and the natural order. (The Doctrine of the Mean is also called the Doctrine of Centrality and Rectitude, where "rectitude" likewise signifies constancy and the principles of heaven.) The Doctrine of the Mean demands not only prudence and control in operational rationality but, above all, walking the correct path—that is, the path of constant heavenly principles. Xiao Shu's theory of constitutional moderation accurately captures two core elements shared by both classical and modern interpretations of the Doctrine of the Mean: it encompasses both the "righteousness" of constitutionalism and the "centrality" of the middle way. This new political doctrine, embodying a balance between value rationality and operational rationality, is it the product of Xiao Shu's theoretical self-awareness, or does it stem from a natural intuition? We cannot say. Observing Xiao Shu's consistently

moderate and conservative disposition over the years, we may reasonably infer that his natural intuition has significantly contributed to the development of his theoretical self-awareness. We certainly look forward to seeing Xiao Shu maintain a balance between this natural intuition and theoretical self-awareness as he refines and advances this groundbreaking theory of constitutional moderation.

May 16, 2020

Employing Historical Wisdom to Professionally Design China's Future Democratic System

—A Review of Wu Si's Answer Sheet: "China's Conscientious Intellectuals Discuss Constitutional Democracy"

Wu Si, the renowned scholar who coined the term "unwritten rules," excels in his deep research of Chinese history and his keen insight into the true nature of the political arena. His broad vision and core assessments regarding the design of China's future constitutional democracy are particularly incisive and uniquely perceptive. In a sense, his response paper, "China's Conscientious Intellectuals Discuss Constitutional Democracy," demonstrates the demeanor of a "professional political system designer" due to its blend of historical knowledge and practical grounding. Its academic character reveals a new possibility for "civil constitutionalism": the alliance of historical wisdom and pragmatic operation.

I. The Mode of Political Transition and Institutional Choice Are Determined by the Initiative in Political Change

The greatest things are often the simplest, as straightforward as your own present existence. Yet contemporary individuals remain entangled in layers of complex information and terminology. Wu Si, already the author of several acclaimed works, now appears to be advancing toward a higher realm of simplifying complexity. In his response, his assertions on grand concepts like liberty and democracy are as concise as aphorisms: The core element of democracy is that the electorate can authorize and recall their political representatives, ensuring the agency mechanism functions effectively." Freedom is "a mechanism of self-responsibility, free from scapegoating or encroachment." "Popular sovereignty manifests through periodic elections, media oversight, citizen self-governance, and the separation of powers to achieve checks and balances, thereby controlling authority."

These concise definitions largely pinpoint conceptual essence by outlining operational forms. Clearly, operationalism is the core method

through which Wu Si understands the conceptual system of constitutional democracy. In designing China's future political framework, Wu Si also categorizes and confirms specific choices for different stages and institutional forms based on the operational convenience needs during the transition process and the requirements for a stable, pluralistic state at the transition's endpoint.

For instance, regarding whether China's future constitutional democracy should adopt a presidential or parliamentary system, Wu Si argues: "First, implement a presidential system. After experiencing the divisive setbacks that presidential systems are prone to, transition to a parliamentary system. The presidential system can leverage strong executive power to complete the transition. Chinese people are familiar with this governance model, which aligns with the tradition of imperial authority and totalitarianism and suits a society where political parties and factions are underdeveloped. After the transition is complete and the strong president exits the historical stage, a parliamentary system should be adopted." While the presidential system offers operational convenience for the transition process, Wu Si holds a greater preference for the parliamentary system prevalent in Europe when it comes to the diverse representativeness required for a stable and enduring democratic system in the long term, because "for such a complex and diverse large country, a parliamentary system is a better choice."

Regarding whether China will adopt a two-party or multi-party system in the future, Wu Si contends that this will be determined not by academic principles but by the actual balance of power. "If the transition is led by the ruling party, a two-party system is more likely. If it is led by civil society through roundtable-style negotiations, a multi-party system becomes inevitable. Each has its merits. A two-party system suits the initial presidential phase, while a multi-party system aligns with the later parliamentary phase. Let it unfold naturally; there's no need for deliberate design."

So will China's future political transition be led by civil society or by the government? Wu Si assesses that "a transition led by civil forces... is only the second most likely scenario. For this second possibility to materialize, the ruling party must experience severe internal divisions that significantly undermine its capacity for action." Given current realities, Wu Si believes

that a "reform-oriented transition led by the ruling party" is the most likely scenario. "In such a transition, political and social organizations outside the system may emerge, but roundtable discussions may not occur, as seen in Russia and Taiwan."

Regarding the once-popular notion of "moderate center-right and moderate center-left forces forming the primary social alliance," Wu Si similarly assesses which political force controls the initiative in political transformation. "If the ruling party leads, as in Taiwan, the initial division should be between officials and the public, not between left and right. Left-right alliances are products of parliamentary politics, emerging only after transition." Wu's implicit conclusion is that, while China's current political polarization between officials and citizens is already quite pronounced, the left-right binary divide has yet to solidify—a profound insight for understanding today's Chinese political landscape.

Can China's political transition avoid unrest in its border regions? Wu Si contends this hinges on whether "top-down control" exists. "Reforms initiated nationally from the top down should ensure citizens' rights find representation early on within nationwide parties or organizations, establishing channels for their demands. Civil society should be built around citizens' rights, not around ethnic language or other specific identities. In this way, civic identity may supersede ethnic identity, and ethnic divisions will not become focal points of conflict. Conversely, if reforms proceed bottom-up, as in the Soviet republics where civic rights were organized along ethnic lines, ethnic divisions will gain deep and complex dimensions, making reconciliation difficult."Wu Si cites South Africa and Spain as successful examples of top-down transformation, while the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia exemplify the uncontrolled chaos of bottom-up approaches. The cautionary lesson is clear: in nations with intense ethnic tensions, "bottom-up reform"—specifically, electoral arrangements initiated at intermediate levels (such as republics, provinces, or states)—can readily catalyze or exacerbate ethnic divisions.

While outlining various possible logics of change, Wu Si repeatedly emphasizes the critical importance of "top-down control" for peaceful transition. This underscores his profound sense of responsibility, long-term foresight, and the respect and conservatism inherent in his institutional background. Of course, to observers with differing perspectives, this

conservatism may also imply certain limitations. His theories of power dynamics or "meta-rules" seem to carry an inherent risk of obscuring the trajectory of truth: if progress cannot follow the path of constitutional democracy, how far can any form of power control—including "top-down control"—ultimately go?

II. The Concept of County-Level Autonomy and Operationalist Differentiation

Implementing a federal system, in Wu Si's view, is an inherent requirement for the future arrangement and operation of China's democratic institutions. However, within this federal framework, "the central government's power should be somewhat greater than that of the United States." The primary rationale is economic: "Given the vast disparities across China's regions, without central-level redistribution, domestic fragmentation would be too severe. The maturation of civil society's self-governance capacity also requires considerable time." Given that autonomous provinces or states—particularly impoverished and frontier regions—remain heavily economically dependent on the central government, implementing a democratic federal system in China possesses strong inherent cohesion.

Federalism is essentially a modern form of local autonomy. So, in principle, should fundamental local autonomy be based on provinces or counties? Wu Si argues it should be counties. "This is the most stable unit historically. Chinese counties are already sizable, and effective autonomy cannot be too large. Moreover, given China's tradition of valuing a unified state and of considering nationwide resistance to secession, county-level autonomy can create a stable pattern in which 'many feudal lords are established to reduce their power.' Before traditional values change, this approach lowers the risk of separatist claims leading to conflict." Let us envision nearly 3,000 highly autonomous counties spread across China's vast territory of 10 million square kilometers. This would indeed constitute the flattest possible structure. Within such a super-flat system, any centrifugal force seeking to consolidate dozens of highly autonomous counties into a centralized framework to advance ethnic secession would face immense operational challenges. At minimum, such a force would require massive financial resources that only the central government could afford—a task that is technically nearly impossible. Therefore, within a liberal democratic

constitution, establishing counties as the primary units of local self-governance and directly linking central government fiscal transfers to these highly autonomous counties—which possess autonomous legislative powers—while bypassing all intermediate levels (provinces, states, or municipalities), would indeed serve as a powerful institutional lever to prevent separatism and ethnic conflict. In fact, this approach could also promote the "decentralization of provinces and empowerment of counties" in inland regions, broadly boosting local economic and cultural prosperity while enabling more effective governance at the grassroots county and township levels.

Wu Si's elaboration on how county-level autonomy could form a new strategic approach of "establishing numerous feudal lords while reducing their power" can be seen as a creative reinterpretation of Jia Yi's "reducing feudal power" ideology from the early Western Han Dynasty. The novelty lies in the fact that this new "reducing feudal powers" is not aimed at strengthening the central government and weakening localities, but rather at the central government and provincial/municipal governments ceding power to strengthen and empower counties. This achieves genuine local autonomy closer to the grassroots and closer to the citizens who are the bearers of sovereignty. This highly creative revelation of principles will undoubtedly provide profound insights for analyzing and designing the vertical power structure of a future democratic China.

It bears repeating and emphasizing that Wu Si's constitutional democratic framework places particular emphasis on full individual liberty and civic self-governance. His envisioned blueprint for "separation of powers between officials and citizens" posits that "a fully developed civil society, where citizens engage in self-governance, should exist in a state of weak government—neither anarchic nor authoritarian—as the ideal low-cost, high-efficiency model of social governance. This is also the pathway for citizens' self-realization. In the future, it should increasingly replace governmental functions."

Wu Si's thinking often favors unconventional approaches, and his responses occasionally reveal remarkable imagination. When discussing how to design a constitutional review mechanism to uphold the constitution and constitutional governance, he proposed: "We could emulate Germany by establishing a constitutional court staffed by professional judges to handle

cases related to constitutional violations. This court should be located far from Beijing. If a federal system were implemented, it could be situated in Hong Kong or Taiwan."An overly powerful and expansive capital city is detrimental to the balanced pluralism of China's democratic politics. Paris's disproportionate influence has made it difficult even for liberal democratic France to escape the encroachments, abuses of power, and bureaucratic inertia inherent in a centralized system. In contrast, the United States created a separate capital in the small town of Washington, D.C., enabling the federal government to effectively avoid the infiltration and interference of various special-interest groups in major cities. In my view, Wu Si's proposal to locate the future constitutional court in Hong Kong (or Taiwan, though high-speed rail may not reach directly?) aligns with the principle of geopolitical equilibrium within China and is highly feasible.

Regarding future voting mechanisms, Wu Si has proactively proposed innovative procedural designs for critical junctures that account for the new characteristics of the information society. "Japan's voting experience shows that young people face higher time costs, while the elderly face lower ones. Consequently, senior citizens have higher voter turnout and greater influence on decision-making—a phenomenon termed 'silver capitalism' where resources tend to favor elderly welfare over long-term development." Given the time and transportation costs associated with individual voting, China's future voter turnout is unlikely to be optimistic. Wu Si therefore recommends: "China can leverage its widespread internet access and identity verification advantages to establish an online voting system, reducing the time cost of voting....Consider implementing dual systems—online and in-person voting—allowing each voter two ballots: one online and one physical. This approach would reduce voting costs while revealing the intensity of support for specific proposals among different voter groups." The core design principle here balances voter turnout with verifiability, an intention rich with deeper implications worthy of further exploration.

Wu Si's operationalist philosophy, when applied to institutional design, often yields unique insights and even creative beginnings. This demonstrates that Wu Si has devoted considerable time and effort to the question of "how to build constitutional democracy after democratization," and his thinking has been thoroughly liberated. In designing the institutional framework for constitutional democracy, Wu Si has displayed glimpses of his historical

wisdom and a level of strategic thinking that could be described as "strategic thinker" caliber—though this certainly does not reveal the full extent of his capabilities.

III. Constitutional Democracy as an Evolutionary Upgrade of Confucian Civilization

I greatly admire Wu Si's approach to preserving traditional Chinese culture. He believes ancient Chinese culture and universal values are compatible. "The Confucian principles of benevolence and righteous governance fundamentally require rulers to extend their own values to others—to refrain from imposing on others what they themselves would not desire. However, this primarily remained at the level of self-discipline, lacking institutional hard constraints. Constitutional democracy is precisely the system that compels rulers to extend their values to others—it is this hard constraint that can remove those who overstep their bounds."In this sense, constitutional democracy represents an evolutionary upgrade of Confucian civilization. There is no fundamental conflict between Confucian culture and Western civilization on core issues. Conflicts arise at secondary and tertiary levels—areas within Confucianism itself that require upgrading. Once this upgrade succeeds, China's most creative social groups will further unleash their potential, forging an even more prosperous society." Wu Si's assertion that "hard constraints" upgrade "soft constraints" succinctly captures the essence of the issue in a single, concise statement. Yet ancient Chinese Confucian political culture actually possessed numerous hard constraints. The ancients did not live by dogma alone, nor did they live in vain. Beginning with Emperor Yuan of the Western Han Dynasty, Confucian political figures strategically sought to institutionalize and mechanize the ideas of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi—specifically their concepts of the "straight path" and "rectifying the ruler"—to limit power. Of course, China's ancient tradition of power limitation extended beyond Confucian explorations. If we avoid viewing the Confucian political tradition as monolithic—and similarly avoid treating constitutional frameworks as monolithic—we can discern that over 2,500 years of Chinese political tradition has accumulated substantial elements of power limitation and checks and balances. Many of these components can be integrated into and reborn within China's future constitutional democratic system. Wu Si's

characterization of Confucian benevolence and benevolent governance as primarily confined to soft constraints and self-discipline is grounded solely in the texts of Confucius and Mencius, and shows little alignment with the subsequent two millennia of Chinese political practice. In other words, while Wu Si's historical conservatism is quite bold among contemporary liberal scholars, it still seems insufficiently conservative.

In response to the question, "What positive elements from the past seventy years, the past century, and the preceding two millennia do you believe China's future constitutional democracy should inherit and preserve?" Wu Si provided four specific answers:

"Over two millennia, Confucius' agnosticism regarding supernatural entities, along with Confucian principles of benevolence and righteousness and the doctrine of the Mean, laid the foundation for a tolerant and moderate worldview, philosophy of life, and political perspective." This understanding is remarkably astute and reflects a lofty intellectual horizon.

"Second, the two-thousand-year-long, though unsuccessful, will and effort to tame violence and power, along with the struggle for the yet-unattained freedom to combine the labor factor of peasants with the land factor." The right to resist was a powerful substantive force in ancient China, and peasants' private ownership of land was also a major factor in the flourishing of ancient Chinese civilization. Unfortunately, it was temporarily lost during the era of totalitarianism. In what creative form will it return in the future?

"Third, the century-long yearning for renewal in transitioning to modern society and the recognition of traditional shortcomings." Could the Chinese people's open-mindedness toward learning be unrelated to the first character "学" (xué) in the Analects? Could it not be deeply connected to the Confucian ideal of "the world as one family"? Our generation's persistent pursuit of learning and its embrace of the political truths of constitutional democracy also bear witness to the deepest-rooted customs and traditions of the Chinese people.

Fourth, the seventy-year-long demand for equality and the ideals of opposing slavery and oppression. Regarding this final point, some radical liberals may hold differing views. In my opinion, while the ideal of equality is indeed an intermediary value relative to the ultimate status of liberal democracy, it remains a structural component of liberal democracy. It is not the antithesis of freedom as some polarized thinkers imagine. We must never dogmatically reject equality. Crucially, future China must never retreat from the nationwide "consensus on equality."

The above four points are certainly not a complete answer, nor is it necessary to propose an exhaustive one. Unique individual expression provides others with more novel insights. Across three distinct historical phases, Wu Si's intellectual antennae have captured substantive core elements, demonstrating truly remarkable intellectual acuity.

Regarding how to handle relations with Western democratic nations and more effectively advance human peace, civilization, and freedom, Wu Si states: "By imitating and learning from Western countries—demonstrating and genuinely committing to learning from them—we must tenaciously complete the final steps of modernization transformation, even if it means suffering losses and humiliation. We must reform our semi-authoritarian, semi-totalitarian characteristics, especially the semi-totalitarian traits. Then, after and during this transformation, we should willingly accept second place, honoring the king and repelling the barbarians. The king represents the Way of the King, which is the Way of Freedom." The call to "reform our semi-totalitarian, semi-authoritarian characteristics" cuts straight to the heart of the matter, with "our" referring to both the government and the people. The phrase "willingly accept second place" reveals Wu Si's strategic mindset. But who are the "barbarians" in "honoring the king and repelling the barbarians"?Wu Si may have intentionally left this ambiguous. Domestic policy is foreign policy; the paramount goal remains ensuring China's hundreds of millions of citizens enjoy maximum sovereignty, dignity, and rights, along with the fullest personal freedom, individual development, and happiness.

In fact, Wu Si's philosophy of constitutional democracy emphasizes fundamental human rights, and his approach to safeguarding them leans toward operational pragmatism. For instance, he argues that "parliamentary systems offer stronger protections for minorities" and that "an upper house

can safeguard the interests of minority-concentrated areas. Constitutional review mechanisms, such as constitutional courts, can prevent the rights of the majority from exceeding constitutional boundaries. Various safeguards for freedom collectively contribute to protecting the fundamental rights of minorities." Similarly, his proposal to reduce financial support for state media to foster media pluralism remains grounded in concrete operational considerations, offering tangible substance beyond abstract discussions of "what ought to be."

Through his essay "Chinese Intellectuals of Conscience Discuss Constitutional Democracy," historian Wu Si—who for years has championed new concepts such as "unwritten rules" and the "law of blood reward"—demonstrates his strategic vision and comparative advantage in designing political systems. The monumental task of designing China's future constitutional democracy framework indeed requires the specialized participation of pragmatic scholars who are well-versed in both ancient and modern knowledge and have risen from the grassroots within the system. For Wu Si, this response should mark only the beginning of his professional engagement and expression.

Shaping a Constitutional Democracy through an Independent Civil Society

— Review of Guo Yuhua's Response Paper "China's Conscientious Intellectuals on Constitutional Democracy"

Professor Guo Yuhua is a renowned sociologist and one of the few human rights defenders and outspoken advocates for freedom. A defining feature of Professor Guo Yuhua's constitutional democracy ideas in her response paper is her strict adherence to her sociological expertise, as she examines the interaction between constitutional democracy and civil society primarily from a sociological perspective. The intellectual rigor demonstrated reveals her as a pioneering explorer who has advanced civil society research to the stage of uncovering deep causal principles.

Input and Output of the Constitutional Democracy System

In Guo Yuhua's view, "Constitutionalism is a political principle asserting that state governance power derives from and is constrained by the constitution, as well as a doctrine defining and protecting citizens' rights. Constitutional democracy constitutes the operational mechanism of representative democracy." Within constitutional democracy, "Government power originates from the formal consent of the governed; citizens possess the right to participate meaningfully in the decision-making process."If we view the power system as a relatively independent social public management system, then the procedural authorization by the sovereign people (i.e., the citizenry) and their subsequent political participation constitute the input end of the power system. Meanwhile, the horizontal separation of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, along with the vertical separation of powers in federal systems, represent the power system's own processes of limiting, dividing, and balancing power. Guo Yuhua fundamentally emphasizes the primacy of the sovereign citizenry as the input end of the power system, which precedes the internal operational processes of power, such as the separation of powers. The subject of constitutional democracy is the citizenry, not power itself.

Simultaneously, Guo examines the legitimacy criteria of a political system from the perspective of its output. In her view, the core tenets of constitutional democracy are "limiting power to prevent tyranny; protecting rights to defend freedom." These two core elements fundamentally articulate the legitimacy of the constitutional democratic system's output under popular sovereignty.

At the output end, Guo examines the profound influence of the power system on individuals' private lives. She notes, "At the societal level, constitutional democracy is not merely a choice of political system but also a choice of lifestyle. It is often said that 'democracy and freedom cannot put food on the table.' Yet without reasonable institutional safeguards, people truly cannot feed themselves—China's Great Famine stands as irrefutable proof. A nation's people—their sustenance, housing, clothing, birth, aging, sickness, death, joys, sorrows, happiness, and dignity—are all intimately tied to the nature of their political system. In recent years, China's political system has undergone a sudden mutation, evolving from a form of oligarchy under totalitarianism into a monolithic dictatorship under totalitarianism. Consequently, dark clouds of political, social, and economic crises have gathered over the land. Private enterprises have gradually declined, while bankruptcy, unemployment, and even hunger have begun to encroach upon the personal lives of countless citizens. This is yet another irrefutable proof of the system's adverse impact on individual existence. Both phenomena powerfully demonstrate the grave and tangible dangers inherent in the "unjust export" of a power system that runs counter to modern political civilization.

Constitutional democracy does not resolve all political dilemmas; issues like oversight of authority and administrative efficiency remain major challenges for democratic nations. Yet it addresses fundamental concerns: individual dignity, sovereignty, freedom, sustenance, healthcare, societal justice, harmony, and enduring stability. The three key tenets emphasized in Guo Yuhua's constitutional democracy—citizen electoral endorsement, participatory decision-making (system input), and safeguarding freedom and individual lifestyles (system output)—directly correspond to Lincoln's famous "government of the people, by the people, for the people."In one article, Guo Yuhua explicitly states, "...government of the people, by the people, for the people—that is true constitutional democracy." This reveals

Guo Yuhua's unique sociological perspective: defining and substantively understanding "constitutional democracy" from both the input and output ends of the system.

A genuine civil society counters power rather than becoming dependent on it

The core tenets of Guo Yuhua's constitutional democracy philosophy emphasize the agency of citizens, the independent development of society, and societal checks on political power. Yet he explicitly opposes "pseudo-society"—those forms of pseudo-populism and pseudo-nationalism that cling to political power while losing their independent character.

As a moderate conservative, Guo Yuhua affirms the inherent value of patriotism. Loving one's country and homeland is intrinsically linked to cherishing its landscapes, its people, and its traditional customs and culture. In her essay "Chinese Intellectuals of Conscience Discuss Constitutional Democracy," she explicitly states: "We must explore how to foster a virtuous cycle between cultural traditions, political institutions, and ideologies. The conservative principles of preserving freedom, respecting tradition, and exercising prudence are worthy of reference." From this natural conservative standpoint, she poses a sharp challenge to the currently prevalent populism and nationalism: "First, when you hear the word 'nation,' what comes to mind? Mountains and rivers, homeland and native soil, elders and fellow villagers, our people and our tribe, cultural traditions, and the origins of civilization; of course, there is also the nation as a political concept—a political organization and state apparatus."What do you truly love—our homeland and native soil, or the ruler's empire and state? In her view, the notion that supporting political power and the government constitutes the essence of patriotism is fundamentally a form of servile dependence that sacrifices independent character and human dignity. The new wave of ultra-leftism, fueled by nationalist sentiment and directed against the West, democracy, and freedom, represents an extreme act of ignorance that tramples on humanitarian ideals, enslaves the self, and diminishes one's own worth.

Guo Yuhua further frames the issue in terms of love's natural essence: "Love is autonomous, love is voluntary, love springs from the heart, and love is reciprocal—thus love cannot be forced. Forced love is not love; it is

violence." This means that the authentic state of patriotism should be love rooted in independent personality, grounded in individual sovereignty, voluntary and intrinsic, and characterized by tolerance and inclusiveness. "For ourselves and our descendants, we bear the responsibility to make it better and better." Thus, natural and healthy patriotism must consciously cherish independent personalities, cherish freedom, and cherish constitutional democracy. Criticizing the government based on public morality is precisely an active expression of patriotism; servile personalities attached to power are unworthy of the noble name of "love."

Through Guo Yuhua's sociological lens, China's version of populism manifests more as power politics than genuine social sentiment. It is essentially a form of political power operation and a phenomenon of servile dependency, rather than an authentic and natural social movement. Populism itself is not inherently frightening. "Because unrestrained power operates without accountability, populism struggles to take root in China. In Chinese society, faced with a powerful, omnipresent authority, the populace remains weakened, impoverished, and ignorant. Nearly all channels for expression and spaces for action are blocked, making collective action and social movements difficult to form. Therefore, what we face is likely not populism but populist weakness."

How can we facilitate the transition from "weak populace" to "strong populace"? Guo Yuhua clearly states that it requires actively and autonomously building a civil society. "Building a civil society is not a process dominated by power, nor is it power's occupation of society. It cannot be reduced to merely promoting the development of various social undertakings, nor is it about controlling society. Rather, it involves fully unleashing society's own agency—that is, building a civil society and an active society in the sense of self-governance. Society's autonomy and self-governance are, in fact, crucial mechanisms and means for establishing social order, as well as the fundamental drivers of social prosperity and vitality." In other words, it is society itself that independently self-organizes, governs autonomously, and generates a spontaneous, virtuous cycle of social order—rather than the state artificially and anti-liberally disrupting the natural "social order." Guo Yuhua contends that "civil society is the vessel of 'popular sovereignty.' The aggregation of atomized individuals does not constitute a rights-bearing entity but rather the fertile ground for totalitarian

rule—the so-called 'mass base.'" The free and flat organizational form of the citizenry constitutes civil society."The fundamental essence of society should be civil society relative to the state and an active society relative to the market." Faced with inherently powerful, expansive, and infringing political power, merely having independent citizens is insufficient; there must also be an independent civil society formed voluntarily, consciously, and freely. "A strong populace" is more important, more substantial, and more fundamental than "a strong state."

"The Priority of Action Over Structure"

So how can an independent and free civil society be built? Guo Yuhua points out that "the development of civil society depends on the production of citizens, citizenship rights, and civic consciousness. Building society must begin with cultivating citizens, requiring interaction and mutual construction among institutions, culture, and actors. Transformations in political systems, the establishment of sound institutions, and a healthy social ecosystem do not materialize spontaneously. They demand the participation, pursuit, and concerted efforts of all societal forces." This emphasis on "production"—the causal dynamics within human society—constitutes one of Professor Guo Yuhua's defining theoretical characteristics and represents the cutting edge of her scholarship, elevating it beyond superficial generalizations and commonplace perspectives.

Within sociological research paradigms, "cultural determinism" has declined, while structuralism and "institutionalism" have been deconstructed. Yet deconstructionism and various postmodernist theories remain too fragmented to address the fundamental question of "seeking the deep causal relationships of social change." Guo Yuhua stands as a rare Chinese sociologist who, dissatisfied with purely empirical investigation and description, boldly seeks causal explanations. In her response, she explicitly proposes that the formation of civil society can be explained by the "priority of action over structure." In this regard, she draws inspiration from French sociologist Alain Duhamel's theory of action sociology. Duhamel was dissatisfied with social research that focused solely on social systems while overlooking human agency, positioning actors as passive entities within social structures—as if they were inevitably destined to be losers within institutional frameworks. He called for the return of the actor (Duhamel, The

Return of the Actor, 2002). Guo Yuhua expanded on this, proposing the idea that citizens' active actions shape civil society and constitutional democracy. She contends, "Do not underestimate the seemingly insignificant practices of actors. Their agency manifests in continually probing and testing the boundaries of structures, expanding spaces within narrow crevices, and carving openings amidst thick oppression. Simultaneously, the subjectivity of actors is forged through resistance practices; the formation of subject consciousness among diverse resisting subjects is itself a product of practice."

In contemporary China, one primary form of action is contestatory expression. "The space for contestation is stretched open through the act of contesting; the space for expression is gained through the effort to express. The process itself is crucial. In this sense, the transformation from 'the masses' to passive citizens and then to active citizens is desirable. The primary force of civil society consists of organized citizens who understand the law, possess reason, recognize their rights and obligations, and can legitimately and reasonably protect their rights. The process of action can produce courageous, wise, and capable citizens. Only through participation, expression, and action can organized citizens escape the fate of being "subjected to X" and civil society itself is produced precisely in the process of putting the ideals of civil society into practice. Fundamentally distinct from totalitarian "organization," civil society is structured on the "social" side rather than the "state" side. It is independent, not dependent; its structure is flat, based on free contracts, not hierarchical, based on coercion and command. Civil society does not exist as a tool or intermediary for the "publicness of the power system"; it constitutes an independent publicness and public space in itself. Through active engagement, countless individuals can "produce" an independent civil society, a self-actualizing, dynamic society, and a participatory political community (including political parties, which Professor Guo Yuhua conceptualizes as "professional social organizations"). Moreover, individuals themselves grow into active citizens endowed with moral courage, sound reason, participatory awareness, and participatory capacity through this process of active engagement.

In summary, Guo Yuhua argues that active civic action can catalyze multiple deep-seated social causal chains: (1) "The autonomous, pluralistic, 'decentralized' public space formed by civic expression possesses the

efficacy of 'the wisdom of the crowd,' and in this process, the mental qualities of citizens are forged and developed." The strength of spirit will become the universal state of free citizens. (2) "The action process not only has or may lead to corresponding policy changes or even legal adjustments, but organized action also contains the power to alter structures, driving transformations in social production and institutions." Within this, an independent civil society, a self-actualizing, active society, and a participatory political society crystallize as intermediate bridges between the state and society. This can be termed one of society's substructures. (3) "Action has the potential to create and sustain a social space, and this social space itself constitutes an achievement of resistance." Moreover, the cyclical and comprehensive flourishing of diverse social movements will foster the pluralism and equilibrium of the social space itself.

At this point, Guo Yuhua's research on the interaction between constitutional democracy and civil society reaches the stage of uncovering and revealing the causal principles of society. The depth and cutting-edge nature of this thinking are astonishing and will undoubtedly provide numerous important insights for domestic political science and sociology research.

Guo Yuhua concludes: "Fundamentally, only when individuals are empowered, and society is robust, can a constitutional democracy under popular sovereignty emerge. Constitutional democracy is built upon the foundations of the public sphere and civil society. A nation's civilizational progress is inevitably propelled by the concerted efforts of diverse social forces. Just as a stable and effective political system requires separation of powers, local autonomy, and checks and balances, social structures necessitate a relatively balanced and mutually restraining relationship among the market, government, and society. Only then can they confront the increasingly complex realities of modern economic and social life and forge effective pluralistic governance. Rights precede power; rights must guide and regulate power; rights must maintain a positive, dynamic equilibrium with power. Without this, there can be no true individual dignity, freedom, or happiness, nor can there be effective and sustainable good governance for the nation.

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The Embryo and Depth of "Constitutional Engineering"

—A Review of Zhang Qianfan's Response Paper "China's Conscientious Intellectuals on Constitutional Democracy"

The profound specialization and multidimensional depth of Zhang Qianfan's constitutional democracy theory are evident in his response paper, Chinese Intellectuals of Conscience on Constitutional Democracy. His operational discourse on political system design not only embodies a deep commitment to values but also consistently employs epistemology and methodology for theoretical deduction and logical argumentation. The operationalization of theory and the theorization of operations advance in tandem, demonstrating equal emphasis on both substance and application. The blueprint for China's future constitutional democracy will undoubtedly draw rich nourishment, insights, and even major conceptual frameworks or pathways from Professor Zhang Qianfan's long-term theoretical work.

I. The Essence of Constitutionalism and the Foundation of the Constitution

What is constitutional democracy? In his response to the "Chinese Intellectuals on Constitutional Democracy" questionnaire, Zhang Qianfan first asserts that constitutional democracy constitutes a "limited pluralism" that constrains democracy, the very notion of "rule by the majority." Only when democracy is bound by freedom, the rule of law, and the separation of powers can it avoid degenerating into the "tyranny of the majority." Certain fundamental aspects of human nature serve as the logical starting point for this constitutional philosophy. In Zhang Qianfan's view, "All humans are rationally self-interested, and those who wield state power are no exception." Rational self-interest does not equate to evil; reasonable self-interest is the driving force of wealth creation in civilized societies. However, when self-interest exceeds reasonable bounds, it tends toward malfeasance."Those who govern are human, not gods; they possess human vices. Therefore, not only must they be mutually constrained, but ultimately, the people must curb their impulses to act maliciously—to infringe upon the people's interests for

private gain—through constitutional mechanisms." Zhang Qianfan thus reveals the philosophical essence of constitutionalism: it is the constitutional mechanism by which the people restrain the human vices of those in power. In terms of intellectual origins, this assertion can also be seen as the institutional implementation of Plato and Aristotle's principle of "reason regulating emotion."

What is a constitution? Zhang Qianfan asserts, "A constitution should be a blueprint of the social contract, which is an agreement on fundamental principles of governance that every rational person can endorse." Core tenets of "political natural law"—democracy, the rule of law, and freedom—constitute the essential elements of this social contract. China's current constitution fails to meet the basic requirements of a social contract, exhibiting structural flaws, making the drafting of a new constitution imperative." Although the 'constitutional moment' cannot be a strictly contractual process, constitution-making must emulate contracting as closely as possible." This requires not only supermajority consent but also the utmost inclusivity of the constituent assembly, rejecting simple majority rule. In short, the constituent assembly is the practical implementation of the social contract.

II. The Framework of Parliamentary Federalism

Guided by a new constitution grounded in political natural law and the social contract, China will establish a top-level institutional framework of separation of powers and checks and balances. Should China adopt a presidential or parliamentary system? Zhang Qianfan argues that since Yale political scientist Linz proposed the "crisis of the presidential system" in the 1990s, people have gradually recognized several inherent flaws in presidential systems: excessive presidential power may fuel personal ambition and undermine political stability, while policy disagreements between the president and Congress can lead to legislative gridlock and reduce legislative efficiency. Therefore, China would be better suited to adopt a British or German-style parliamentary system. While American-style presidential systems are widely favored among Chinese citizens, Zhang Qianfan clearly articulates a unique perspective that diverges from popular opinion.

A key feature of Zhang Qianfan's constitutional democracy theory is his strong emphasis on federalism and local autonomy. He argues that "for a country like China, with its vast population, immense territory, complex ethnic composition, and significant regional disparities, some form of federalism is clearly an inevitable trend.""In constitutional terms, federalism provides constitutional safeguards for local autonomy." Local autonomy encompasses three dimensions: personnel autonomy, legislative autonomy, and institutional autonomy. Among these, Zhang Qianfan particularly emphasizes "institutional autonomy": one advantage of federalism is that it creates space for local institutional innovation and competition. For instance, whether adopting a parliamentary system or a gubernatorial system, as long as it does not violate republican democracy, states can experiment with their governmental structures according to local conditions. He noted that federalism exists in both symmetric and asymmetric forms. China's unique circumstances necessitate the establishment of a multi-tiered, asymmetric federal system. However, "regardless of any special status, China must universally implement constitutional principles respecting liberty, equality, the rule of law, and democratic self-governance across all regions in the future."Special regions like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet possess significant freedom in designing their "legislative autonomy," particularly "institutional autonomy." However, "no matter how local systems are designed, they must not violate the fundamental bottom lines set by the national constitution—for instance, they cannot reinstate serfdom or the union of church and state."

Once horizontal and vertical systems of checks and balances are established, they must be operated by people's representatives elected through periodic elections. Elections themselves must satisfy five procedural norms: universality, directness, freedom, secrecy, and equality. How then should the party system—as the intermediary for competitive elections—be designed in future China? Should it adopt a two-party system or a multi-party system? Zhang Qianfan does not provide a direct answer. Instead, he approaches this widely recognized operational challenge by examining the advantages and disadvantages of district-based and proportional representation systems, and their suitability for China's local context. Under the district system, each district elects only one representative through a "winner-takes-all" approach, leading to the absorption of smaller parties until

two stable major parties emerge. In contrast, the proportional representation system ensures even the smallest parties receive seats in proportion to their vote share, naturally fostering a multi-party landscape. Comparatively, a two-party system offers higher administrative efficiency but lacks diverse public representation; partisan rivalry between the two parties can easily devolve into factional strife, detaching from public justice. A multiparty system offers greater fairness, with seats more accurately reflecting voter preferences. However, an excessive number of parties can fragment parliamentary structures, making it difficult to form stable cabinets and potentially leading to governance crises or even political collapse. For China, which has long operated under a one-party system, the key lies in opening elections in an orderly manner. Implementing proportional representation from the outset could likely result in a chaotic proliferation of parties.To ensure a smooth and stable transition, Zhang Qianfan recommends: "China should continue and reform its current electoral district system, aiming to reduce the number of parties and rationalize their structure. Once party politics stabilizes and voters become familiar with democratic practices, the decision to switch to proportional representation or incorporate its elements can be reconsidered." This prudent perspective clearly has significant practical value.

The essence of constitutional democracy lies in democracy, the heart of democracy is the parliament, and the vitality of the parliament stems from elections. These words by Professor Zhang Qianfan in an essay on constitutional democracy encapsulate the core of his "parliamentary federalism framework." The richness, multidimensionality, and depth of this framework and its theoretical underpinnings have begun to outline the rudiments of a specialized "constitutional engineering."

III. The Pivotal Status of Freedom of Speech and the Press as "Institutional Rights"

Constitutional democracy encompasses not only the operation of government but also the realization of values—namely, the actualization of freedom and human rights. Hegel’s famous definition—"the state is the realization of freedom"—contains partial truth, yet its flaw lies in failing to explicitly name the primary subject: "the individual, all individuals."

In her brilliant political treatise On Revolution, Hannah Arendt sharply critiques traditional notions of negative liberty, which reduces individual liberty and human rights to mere "rights free from state encroachment." While rulers may govern by law, they "monopolize the right to act, bar citizens from the public sphere, force them into the private realm of domestic life, and demand they concern themselves only with their private affairs." While Anglo-American political theory generally regards "consent" as the foundation of political institutions, Arendt contends that mere "consent" is insufficient for balancing the individual against the state. "Every individual outside the constructed political realm remains powerless, while the government, as the result of consent, monopolizes power." (On Revolution, Yilin Press, 2011, pp. 114, 156) True individual liberty must encompass political freedom within a republican community built through mutual contracts. The people stand within the political realm, electing their government and then effectively controlling it through channels like public opinion. This is the essence of the American Revolution and American constitutionalism as Arendt understood it.

Zhang Qianfan's conception of freedom and human rights has, in fact, attained this level of "modernity" in political science. In his examination paper, he states: "Constitutional democracy aims to establish reasonable boundaries between the individual and the state. First, the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual embodied in the Constitution must not be infringed upon by the state. Second, the nation's developmental direction and major policies are ultimately determined by the people themselves through elections, not imposed by the government upon the people. Every few years, the people evaluate the government's actions in an environment of free speech and press freedom, deciding whom to elect to represent their interests." This active conception of individual political liberty transcends the long-prevalent, narrow "non-public, purely passive view of individual liberty" within China.

Among all individual freedoms and human rights, Zhang Qianfan places the highest value on the right to freedom of speech. He refers to freedom of speech and the press as the "trump card" among all constitutional rights. In his view, this political right even surpasses personal rights and property rights. "If even intangible freedoms like thought and speech are denied, how can the government possibly respect your tangible rights such

as personal liberty and property rights?"This intuitive insight finds historical validation in Britain, the cradle of modern liberalism: there, partial suffrage under the principle of "no taxation without representation" emerged first, followed by universal freedom to publish newspapers and periodicals, and partial judicial democracy through the jury system and common law. Only later did the "modern" rights of property and personal liberty, along with their practical realities, come into being. Zhang Qianfan further emphasizes that without freedom of speech, voters cannot freely engage with candidates, rendering elections, mandates, the crystallization of public opinion, and political pressure fundamentally meaningless."Freedom of speech is a foundational trump card for constitutional democracy. ... While China classifies speech, press, and suffrage as 'political rights,' I call them 'institutional rights': they are not only crucial for individuals but also the bedrock of constitutional democracy."

During this year's COVID-19 outbreak, the tragic death of whistleblower Dr. Li Wenliang on the evening of February 6 sparked nationwide grief and a surge in demands for freedom of speech. Zhang Qianfan and others promptly proposed online that February 6 be designated as "China Freedom of Speech Day," an initiative that resonated across society. Zhang Qianfan's strategic acumen stems from his consistent emphasis on freedom of speech. By conceptualizing freedom of speech and the press as the foundation of constitutional democracy and "institutional rights," Zhang's vision pinpoints the operational starting point for citizens' political rights.

IV. Original Explorations: Political Natural Law, Federalism, and the Axis of Moderate Democracy

Many passionate advocates of freedom call for revolution and clamor for it. Yet true revolution, by its very nature, is not about violent means but about the humanitarian idealization of ends; it is not mere imitation but originality in substance. To borrow terms from Chinese tradition, true revolution is not martial virtue but literary virtue—original literary virtue. Literary virtue cannot be born from cries of violence; true revolution always first emerges quietly in the solitude of the scholar's study.

The original intent of the interview series "Chinese Intellectuals of Conscience Discuss Constitutional Democracy" was to explore the

operational and philosophical principles of China's political system over the next two decades. Zhang Qianfan's responses demonstrate that his theoretical reach has partially extended into a principled mode of thinking rarely seen among domestic scholars, with its vanguard even beginning to attempt original exploration.

Within Zhang Qianfan's constitutional democracy framework, a clear conceptual hierarchy emerges: Political Natural Law—Social Contract (Metaconstitution)—Constitution—Concrete Political Institutions. This directly demonstrates his independent theoretical consciousness and substantial capacity for conceptual construction. At the apex of this conceptual hierarchy stands "political natural law," a foundational political concept first proposed by Zhang Qianfan. It specifically refers to fundamental elements such as liberty, democracy, and the rule of law, which exist as universal truths that any legitimate state must respect. The distinctive feature of this understanding lies in affirming liberty, democracy, and the rule of law as natural justice and the inherent principles of humanity—that is, as ultimate human values rather than mere value mediators. This vision is profoundly ambitious and inspiring. It partially demonstrates that Professor Zhang Qianfan, long engaged in deep research on concrete institutional operations, has now embarked on constructing his political philosophy at the conceptual hierarchy and core concept levels.

Beginning with Yan Jiaqi in the 1980s and continuing with scholars like Zhang Bostu and Wang Tiancheng in recent years, Chinese academics' research on federalism has progressed cumulatively, growing increasingly profound and yielding remarkable achievements. At present, Zhang Qianfan's federalism theory stands out for its particular richness and breadth. One of its defining features is the strong emphasis on distilling operational principles, such as: the principle of equality between central and local governments; universal "symmetrical and asymmetrical" standards; the principle of local leadership with central support; the balance between fiscal authority and administrative responsibilities; judicial mechanisms for resolving jurisdictional conflicts; personnel autonomy—legislative autonomy—institutional autonomy; and the principle of appropriately sized autonomous units. These highly valuable reflections on rules and principles outline the intrinsic framework of federalism, which is highly adaptable. The interactions between many operational and theoretical elements revealed

here are far ahead of domestic researchers.

In The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century, Huntington offered this concise and classic description of transformative dynamics: The political spectrum of a changing society broadly comprises four forces—hardline conservatives and moderate reformers within the system, and moderate reformers and radical revolutionaries outside it. When reformers within the system negotiate, compromise, and cooperate with moderate forces outside the system, they can lay the political foundation for democratization. Professor Zhang Qianfan inherited this framework and further developed it into the concept of the "moderate democratic axis." He argues that successful peaceful transitions often result from a powerful alliance between moderate forces inside and outside the system, which squeezes out both hardliners within the system and radicals outside it. "Once a moderate axis emerges within and outside the system, external radicals will diminish and naturally gravitate toward the moderate axis."Moderates outside the system leverage existing social resources to pressure the regime, while moderates within the system actively respond by implementing political and, in some cases, institutional reforms. The effective interaction mechanism between the two spheres and the positive social outcomes not only render hardliners powerless but also help transform radicals, drawing them into the moderate axis."This "moderate democratic axis" possesses openness, capable of absorbing both hardliners within the system and radicals outside it; it also exhibits intrinsic unity, representing not a temporary expedient alliance but an internally cohesive growth under a centrist trajectory. This can cultivate a stable, enduring mainstream centrist base. These novel substantive insights reveal that Zhang Qianfan has attained a level of "conceptual thinking" in transitional political science. To put it plainly, the "moderate democratic axis" is undoubtedly an unprecedented new concept. It thoroughly elucidates the "interaction between officials and the public" and fully explains the core driving mechanism of constitutional democratic transformation. The ability to propose new political science concepts demonstrates a long-awaited capacity for original exploration among Chinese scholars.

Zhang Qianfan's work abounds with incisive insights, many of which directly challenge prevailing views—such as his critique that "roundtable conferences" lack sufficient diversity—demonstrating his exceptional

independence and theoretical courage. Of course, any academic thought—especially one still evolving—inevitably carries theoretical shortcomings. Zhang Qianfan's constitutional democracy framework is no exception. It posits political natural law and social contract theory as foundational premises, yet fails to provide concise, precise definitions for these two core concepts: "What is natural law?" and "What is the social contract?"The statement that "the social contract is an agreement on fundamental principles of governance that every rational person can consent to" is not a true definition. An agreement is a set of fundamental principles already achieved in reality, not a set of principles that every rational person "can consent to," as Zhang claims. Reality and potential are entirely different concepts. An agreement cannot exist in potential form because a genuine agreement must result from negotiation and compromise among multiple parties. Furthermore, the highly sophisticated federal framework designed by Zhang Qianfan exhibits a slight disconnect from China's millennia-long experience of local autonomy. These shortcomings may be subject to philosophical and logical critique, refinement, and progressive development by Professor Zhang Qianfan, who holds an operationalist and experimentalist orientation.

Zhang Qianfan's response demonstrates depth and breadth in addressing China's paramount political question within the mainland intellectual sphere. Upon careful reading, many scholars both domestically and abroad may find it both enlightening and somewhat unsettling—some might even feel they are "beginning to fall behind." This, of course, could be a positive stimulus. May Zhang Qianfan's distinctive thinking create a ripple effect that "stirs up waves upon waves," and may it inspire more constitutional scholars to venture boldly into frontier exploration and original endeavors.

Part Three

Reflections on Democracy

Philosophical Reflections on Conservatism (I)

What is the natural meaning of conservatism? What is its fundamental logical premise? Where do conservatism and revolution converge?

Conservatism has emerged as a prominent school of thought within China's intellectual circles over the past decade. Recent political developments among America's conservative right have further stimulated the pulse of China's domestic conservative currents. The current debate over the essence of conservatism is growing increasingly rich and diverse. Such discourse, grounded in diverse theoretical foundations, serves as fertile ground for intellectual and academic growth. We may thus begin by employing philosophical critique to simplify our contemplation of several profound questions.

I. What is the natural meaning of conservatism? What are its objects or contents of preservation?

Preserving conventions, traditions, rules, and order is understood as the general meaning of conservatism.

This general conception of conservatism has the advantage of its naturalness: what came before flows smoothly, and what follows can continue seamlessly. The "natural" I refer to here extends beyond the everyday Chinese notion of "naturalness" or "going with the flow." It also encompasses the "natural" described by ancient philosophers like Aristotle and Laozi—that is, something autonomous and governed by deep causal relationships. Existing conventions, traditions, and rules and orders are worth preserving precisely because they are beautiful, practical, harmonious, and well-rounded. Hegel's proposition that "what exists is rational" encompasses this meaning to some extent: the objects or content preserved are regarded as possessing natural rationality because they hold a significant comparative advantage in terms of viability or normative value. Burke's assertion that "tradition is organic" likely refers to this very notion: certain traditions

possess an inherent rationality that should not be lightly severed or destroyed.

The general flaw of conservatism lies in its focus on preserving collective entities (encompassing both holistic structures like the nation-state and flat structures like scientific communities) and their established orders. It fails to fundamentally affirm or prioritize individual liberty and sovereignty—core tenets of modern civilization. For instance, Burke strongly advocated that France during the Revolution should preserve the property rights of the Catholic Church, with the Church itself being the object of conservation. Although conserving conventions and regulatory orders often served to protect individual liberty indirectly, their primary and direct goal remained the preservation of macro-level order and the environment. Individual liberty was not treated as the foremost objective of conservation. This inertia of collective existence within conservatism has historically led many conservative movements to become distorted, degenerating into conservatism of collectivist goals that obliterate the individual.

From this perspective, the popular domestic argument that "conservatism is synonymous with preserving freedom" appears to be an artificial or added meaning, rather than the original or common sense of conservatism.

II. What is the antithesis of conservatism? What is its fundamental logical premise?

The problem tree of conservatism grows in an environment of change.

According to a common, sympathetic understanding, tolerable and relatively reasonable conservatism does not oppose change and progress. Rather, it opposes totalitarianism's wholesale transformation and attempts to achieve everything at once. It opposes the violent nature of the change process and its means, as well as their strong negative effects. Regarding the structural content and pacing of change, healthy conservatism generally asserts That Change is permissible but must be achieved incrementally through gradual accumulation, not by destroying everything and starting anew; the pace of change can be steadier, slower, and more restrained.

From this perspective, the antithesis of conservatism is wholesale reconstructionism and violent change theory—commonly referred to as radicalism.

The theory of total reconstruction, also known as the "all-or-nothing" approach, is generally referred to as constructivism or historical nihilism. Its philosophical foundation posits that society's macro-structural existence is holistic. Viewed as a whole, the old is fundamentally old, and the new is fundamentally new. Transformation and progress in macro-order can only be achieved by completely dismantling the old and establishing the new—there is no intermediate metastable state to choose or linger in. This minimalist judgment of "fundamentally so" exposes the holistic soul of total reconstruction theory. By contrasting it with its opposite—total reconstruction theory—we discern a latent logical premise within conservatism: social order and cultural tradition do not exist holistically but as a spatially structured, multi-faceted, and locally self-consistent (metastable) process. Social transformation can occur incrementally, part by part, without degenerating into pathological tension or cancerous fragmentation. Thus, conservatism is fundamentally pluralistic, not monistic.

The theory of violent revolution, at its core, is a struggle aesthetic, a violence aesthetic. In its view, the old is evil and ugly, the new is good and beautiful. The violent act of replacing the old with the new possesses a high degree of moral righteousness and aesthetic pleasure in vitality. Thus, the "violent nature" of the means and process of change itself becomes an ideal measure of value. The philosophical essence of this struggle, aesthetics and violence, is viewing history as a grand chessboard. Individuals or groups who create and possess this violent beauty become the masters of history. The old and new entities (people, order, culture, artifacts, etc.) that constitute the violent process are merely pawns on the board—manipulable, sacrificable, and erasable. This forms another kind of totalitarianism: the totalitarianism of the process of change. Conservatism, standing in opposition to this "grand chessboard theory" or process holism, refers to an understanding of the diversification, everyday nature, and hybridity of the transformation process. It views the new and the old as members of a single extended family, adopting an attitude of appreciation and regret toward the old, while feeling a certain reluctance toward the violent and thorough

eradication of the old. Rooted in this benevolent spirit devoid of hostile fervor, conservatism inherently prioritizes moderation, compromise, and tolerance. To it, moderation is virtue, and the "dramatic" grand compromise between old and new—transforming the old into the new, turning adversaries into allies—is beauty. This aesthetic of compassion, moderation, and hazy ambiguity represents a very different taste from that of struggle or violence.

In a natural-physical sense, standing in opposition to radical social holism and process holism, the social order envisioned by conservatism is a more discrete, divisible, pluralistic, and flat structure—a cluster-like existence akin to tribal confederations. We may interpret this judgment as conservatism's fundamental natural-physical statement, as a presupposition of its worldview (here discussed merely as requiring sufficient justification), or as its logical grand premise. Healthy conservatism entails distinguishing among the various facets of this diverse, flat social order—preserving its enduring virtues while discarding or reforming its detrimental aspects. Within the irreversible chain of time, change is inevitable. Healthy conservatism serves as a counterbalance to such change, reining in excessively radical transformations that carry significant negative consequences.

We may also interpret conservatism's informational essence through the lenses of cybernetics and information theory: conservatism denotes negative feedback applied to both the content and pace of change, anchored in existing rules and order. Conservative theory thus represents the cultural expression of this negative feedback mechanism governing collective transformative behavior.

III. Where Do Conservatism and Revolution Converge?

Based on the above philosophical analysis, healthy conservatism does not oppose change or revolution; it merely opposes totalitarian, radical revolution.

Healthy conservatism is often characterized by a degree of inertia. It generally advocates that when existing rules and order show no significant flaws, inefficiencies, or crises, drastic reform measures should be avoided. If the benefits do not substantially outweigh the burdens, there is no need for change. However, when crises arise due to entrenched inertia or severe external challenges, healthy conservatism does not cling dogmatically to

totalitarian-style preservation. It does not resist the "inevitability" of major transformation or revolution.

A form of conservatism within revolution—the so-called revolutionary centrists or the middle path of revolution—has existed openly or covertly in nearly every successful political revolution. Conservatism within revolution is not counter-revolutionary; it is pragmatic, operational idealism. Often emerging when the tide of revolution rises, it employs systematic, integrated negative feedback mechanisms to tangibly achieve the "true revolution."

What constitutes a "true revolution"? By its very nature, true revolution lies not in violent means but in the humanitarian idealization of its ends; not in mere imitation but in substantive originality. To borrow traditional Chinese terminology, true revolution is not martial virtue but literary virtue—original literary virtue. Literary virtue cannot be birthed by cries of violence; true revolution invariably emerges first in the quiet solitude of the scholar's study.

True revolution will not easily occur until historical originality is achieved through arduous accumulation and continuous breakthroughs, and until the civilized virtue of modern civilization is universally cultivated and consolidated through the unity of knowledge and action and the elevation of introspection.

Given the intrinsic nature of social existence, economic revolutions guided by free markets can generally be gradual. However, political institutional revolutions are inherently radical, as each step in systemic change alters universal rules, leading to corresponding major shifts in the entire social order and way of life. The "gradualist democracy theory" prevalent over the past two decades is fundamentally an unnatural pseudo-doctrine. As the transition between old and new clusters of universal rules concerning fundamental human rights, democratic transformation can proceed in phases. Yet each step constitutes a revolutionary change in universal norms, making political democratization inherently a radical revolution—even with this "inherent radicalism," it remains inadvisable to disrupt the steady rhythm of incremental transformation by forcing a single, comprehensive overhaul. Doing so risks triggering distortion or major regression. Conservatism within radicalism—the golden mean of revolution—is the operational principle that China's political transition must

prioritize today.

As the liberal thinker Liu Junning observes: "The best revolution is the least thorough revolution—the revolution that disturbs the healthy fabric of society the least, the revolution with the least violence, the revolution that claims the fewest lives, the revolution that brings individual liberty and limited government. The worst revolution is the most thorough revolution—the revolution that utterly destroys the entire social and moral order, the most violent revolution, the revolution that claims the most lives, the revolution that brings dictatorship and totalitarianism."

In terms of civilized methods, the model of conservative revolution is the Glorious Revolution in modern Britain, alongside the peaceful transitions in contemporary Eastern European nations, Spain, and South Korea. Over the past year, traveling across China, what I witnessed only strengthened my conviction: For today's China—which has maintained prolonged peace and economic growth without major internal fractures—the desire for civilized political life coupled with an aversion to chaos and a yearning for governance—this negative-feedback political equilibrium mindset—represents the absolute mainstream public sentiment. This conservative national disposition is, in fact, the most fertile ground for a conservative revolution in China. More crucially, no one has the right to defy the prevailing will of these hundreds of millions of sovereign citizens. While China's future political transition path logically encompasses seven or eight possible trajectories, the operational mindset of China's moderate right-wing populace increasingly prioritizes the conservative revolutionary model. This stems first from profound compassion and benevolence, and second from profound wisdom.

Regarding substantive revolution, China's future political transformation should ideally focus solely on political institutions and social self-governance. It should not pursue a totalitarian revolution or comprehensive revolution that seeks to resolve property rights, distribution, history, and cultural demands all at once. Overly ambitious goals and excessive force inevitably induce dangerous hyper-centralization, while too many issues and excessive compromise inevitably dilute overlapping consensus.

Regarding the suppression or delay of political transformation, the

active pursuit of holistic conservative philosophies and counter-revolutionary aesthetics of struggle and violence paradoxically fuels the momentum of political change. This is because such approaches profoundly contradict the mainstream public sentiment, which yearns for civilized political life while rejecting chaos and seeking governance. The vigorous backlash from this conservative mainstream sentiment will catalyze widespread political awakening among the populace and drive the system's intensive structure to progressively shift toward sub-pluralism and sub-flattening. At this juncture, an international environment that is neither precarious nor urgent, coupled with a mainstream public intellectual climate characterized by moderation, goodwill, inclusiveness, and conservatism, may facilitate the contagious, phased major adjustments to key participatory political variables. Amidst this, the momentum toward official-public compromise and national consensus will gradually accumulate. To what height will this momentum ultimately rise? It seems impossible to measure or assess at present. Yet at a baseline level, it has already become one of the primary political trends. Faced with the exploratory path of a giant nation, the mainstream political equilibrium of public opinion, and the alluring prospect that "the benefits of harmony far outweigh those of conflict," all the turmoil stemming from various political variables represents a form of overreach—an unnatural delight in chaos and disorder. Consequently, it also serves as a powerful catalyst for the robust trend of political transformation. In this sense, the conservative revolutionary model is not the "naive fantasy" claimed by extreme radicalism; it is merely a reinterpretation of the traditional Chinese philosophy of "Heaven's Way of Retribution." Amidst the unpredictable natural processes of this "retribution," guided by pure humanitarian ideals, I personally favor the path of kneading dough—a chaotic, hazy journey toward a grand reunion.

Philosophical Reflections on Conservatism (II)

What did Plato, Aristotle, and Confucius seek to preserve? What was Burke's object of preservation? What is the theoretical significance of the decline of the British Liberal Party?

IV. What Did Plato, Aristotle, and Confucius Preserve?

"Conserving" is a verb, a form of "negative feedback" in social life. We assume this "negative feedback" stems from an active, prudent rationality (though not entirely so), and it remains merely a tool of rationality. As the renowned scholar von Kley noted, conservatism is not a value, nor is conservative rationality a value-based rationality. Indeed, many 20th-century scholars criticized conservatism for lacking ideals and grand principles. Historically, many conservatives have indeed been dogmatic, irrational opponents of humanitarian ideals and democracy, unrealistically resisting all significant change while adhering to totalitarianism.

However, in academia, we must distinguish between conservative behavior at the behavioral level and conservative principles or theories at the level of abstract thought. The focus of "philosophical reflection on conservatism" lies solely in the conservative principles or theories at the level of abstract thought.

Before Burke's consciously reflective theory of conservatism in Britain, conservative ideas had existed for over two thousand years. Among these, the conservative thought of Plato, Aristotle, and Confucius was particularly profound and classic.

In The Republic, Plato offered a forceful critique of numerical equality in decision-making mechanisms and of the excessive liberalization of social life in ancient Athenian democracy. Yet he was not opposed to democratic governance. The political institutional frameworks outlined in both The Republic and The Laws remained fundamentally assembly-dominated. The Republic envisioned rule by a single "philosopher-king," a system that still operated within the framework of the citizens' assembly. The Laws

separately proposes establishing a nocturnal council, which may bear some resemblance to the senates of Sparta and Rome that possessed administrative decision-making functions. These political visions can be regarded as revisionist versions of ancient direct democracy, emerging from the Athenian context following the defeat in the Peloponnesian War and driven by concerns rooted in Athenian patriotism. Plato's critique of egalitarian decision-making rests on this common-sense empirical truth: maritime voyages require a helmsman. If the city-state—this vast vessel—is not steered by a helmsman from the political sphere, but instead entrusted to a mob of amateurs with little managerial experience or expertise to collectively vote amid clamorous chaos, it risks suffering a catastrophe like the Sicilian expedition.

Plato's approach of incorporating elite governance elements into the direct democratic platform represented, at the time, a rational critique and vision for political reform. This reform was pursued through a dual conservative effort: preserving the mainstream democratic political platform while re-emphasizing the managerial strengths of the aristocratic system that preceded democracy. It also drew lessons from the Spartan political system, Athens' former rival for hegemony. These ideas did not contradict Plato's ideal experiments in The Republic concerning gender equality and communal property in social life. For Plato, "communism" was not anarchism, but a utopian vision of social equality built upon the foundation of Athenian direct democracy—though slaves were, of course, excluded from both gender equality and communal property.

Building on Plato's conservative political foundations, Aristotle proposed superior forms of government: the aristocracy and the mixed constitution. These corrective explorations of direct democracy by both thinkers can be viewed as distant historical precursors to modern indirect democracy. In Aristotle's view, the aristocracy revered virtue, with its conception of equality being proportional equality distinct from numerical equality, and practiced justice based on virtue: those with virtue rule. Such aristocratic authority aimed to prevent the degradation of authority by numerical egalitarianism while simultaneously affirming life's passions, glory, and excellence. This theorized the "conflict between excellence and equality" in the realm of philosophy of life (though Aristotle, living under

democracy, seemed unaware of how hereditary aristocracy harmed natural excellence). This represents another dimension of ancient conservatism: preserving the just inequality of "excellence"—that is, safeguarding the positive aspects of humanity such as virtue, greatness, glory, life's passions, and quality of life. This can be seen as a negative feedback mechanism against extreme egalitarian tendencies. However, in Western cultural tradition prior to the Renaissance, people appear to have failed to recognize these positive human qualities as still belonging to the realm of merit-based values.

It is commonly believed that the moral philosophy of Confucius and Mencius in Chinese Confucianism was premature and ahead of its time in world history. In fact, their philosophy of life was equally premature and ahead of its time. Similar to Aristotle, Confucius, and Mencius advocated that politics should pursue virtue and that life should pursue virtue. Yet the virtue they understood transcended utilitarian value, reaching the level of humanitarian value—a rare, pure, and universal humanitarianism in ancient society. The benevolent love others, extend generosity to the people, establish others and themselves, take benevolence as their personal responsibility, sacrifice their lives for righteousness, and thereby realize the ideal nature of life. At the core of this new moral and life philosophy lies a hierarchy of excellence (scholar, gentleman, benevolent person, sage) that motivates individuals to ascend step by step. The higher one ascends this hierarchy, the fewer the successful, implicitly suggesting that "the greater the difficulty, the greater the value." This effectively fostered a grand societal framework of spiritual competition, where the pursuit of nobility continually escalated. Since this hierarchy fundamentally represents a scale of virtue and benevolence—free from discrimination based on character, rank, or race—Confucius and Mencius's advocacy for virtue and excellence constitutes an inequality rooted in natural justice.

The most original aspect of Confucius' conservatism lies in his synthesis of political systems. When Yan Hui asked about governing a state, Confucius replied: "Adopt the solar terms of Xia, ride in the chariots of Yin, wear the ceremonial headgear of

Zhou, and perform the Shao dance to music. Banish the licentious music of Zheng; keep the flatterers at a distance. The music of Zheng is licentious; flatterers are treacherous." Though couched in concrete language, Confucius's answer employs symbolic imagery to express this grand vision: synthesizing the finest institutions of the Three Dynasties constitutes the way of governance. The saying, "The Zhou dynasty drew lessons from the two preceding dynasties, how splendidly cultured it was! I follow the Zhou," similarly conveys the idea of synthesizing the ritual and musical teachings of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties to cultivate cultural virtue. This philosophy of synthesizing the Three Dynasties was often constrained by the theoretical limitations of ancient scholarship, expressed as "cherishing antiquity" or "following the ancients." Yet its essence lies in the evolutionary synthesis of ancient exemplary institutions—rituals, music, conventions, and traditions. The character "gu" (古) signifies that what is preserved are time-tested, accumulated treasures that have withstood the test of centuries. Confucius's synthesis of political institutions established a peak of conservative operational principles during the early stages of theoretical scholarship, a development likely closely tied to China's unique historical rhythm of dynastic succession.

In summary: Plato advocated preserving the expertise of political administration; Aristotle revered aristocratic virtues—originally embodying courage and masculinity—which, when generalized into the concept of virtue, still pointed toward an inner excellence; Confucius aspired to synthesize the rituals and cultural artifacts preserved through historical

selection. All three forms of conservatism are relatively natural, as their objects are accumulated, socially recognized spiritual values. Viewed thus, since ancient times, conservative principles have manifested not merely as instrumental approaches seeking "more stable, gradual, and restrained change," but also as substantive principles dedicated to inheriting and upholding established positive spiritual values.

V. What Did Burke Seek to Preserve?

Burke is widely recognized as the father of theoretical conservatism. In his Reflections on the Revolution in France, his scathing critique of radical French revolutionary measures—such as abolishing the Estates-General and confiscating Catholic Church property—hit the nail on the head, as the Chinese would say. Consequently, the work is regarded as the "manifesto of conservatism."

As the starting point for theoretical conservatism, the primary question is: What did Burke advocate preserving? Though his articulation remains somewhat vague and elusive, he nonetheless offered a core formulation: preserving a tradition that emerges from practical experience rather than rational conception, one that has been tempered by time and organically developed from within."Civilized society is the product of custom and habit; therefore, custom and habit are law—that is, custom and habit must constrain and modify the institutions formed under their influence." Burke's conception of tradition is clearly an "organic" tradition fostered by customary law.

Burke's characterization of this tradition as "medieval values" is particularly prone to misinterpretation, yet it actually reflects a specific mapping of Britain's unique historical experience. Within Burke's central proposition—"civilized society is the product of customs and habits"—lies an implicit premise: the social environment that fosters and sustains them must be relatively healthy. Otherwise, customs and habits themselves could not be relatively healthy, nor could they naturally, intrinsically, and organically propel the formation of civilized society.

Over the millennia, such a relatively healthy social environment on this grand historical scale seems to have existed only in Britain. Remarkably, Britain never underwent phases of absolute monarchy or centralized

authority. Its over two-thousand-year social evolution essentially oscillated between three distinct "flat" structures: the pluralistic, flat structure of ancient tribal free societies; the pluralistic, flat structure of medieval aristocratic societies; and the pluralistic, flat structure of modern free-market societies. This sequence represents a singular anomaly in the history of human social evolution. Within the ancient tribal society's pluralistic, flat structure, the political power system remained underdeveloped, relatively weak, and rudimentary. Judicial matters were typically handled through social self-governance. This phenomenon is termed "socialized justice," in which judicial functions served as a social coordination mechanism rather than an expression of political authority. Within this framework, parties embroiled in disputes would mutually agree to seek out a folk adjudicator to uphold fairness. Natural justice thus became the greatest common denominator in the hearts of all citizens who had long relied on such folk adjudication. For millennia, England's common law evolved spontaneously within this judicially socialized mechanism. After the Norman Conquest, William the Conqueror declared Anglo-Saxon law to remain in force, thus preserving the evolutionary continuity of English common law. Though it inevitably retained various prejudices and vices, this approach prevented the imposition of tyrannical laws of a military or political nature. Throughout the successive transitions between these three "flat" systems, not only did the ancient pursuit of natural justice endure, but the procedural civilization of judicial socialization was preserved and enhanced. For instance, the democratic nature of jury trials combined with the independent adjudicative power of professional judges coalesced into a judicial system possessing both governmental and societal public attributes. The Magna Carta, containing clauses for noble checks on the king, can still be understood as a step in the evolutionary process of judicial socialization. When later British nobles continually reaffirmed the Magna Carta's content, they did not emphasize noble privileges but effectively extended the personal protection rights they had gained to all citizens. This reveals the enduring tradition in British society of pursuing natural justice for all. British liberty itself grew generation after generation under the nurturing of the common law tradition—this is the essence of the conservative notion of "English liberty" that has persisted in England since the late Middle Ages.

Burke criticized French philosophers for their constructivist exaggeration of reason's role, failing to recognize its limitations. Yet, in my view, constructivism's true flaw lies in its totalitarian presupposition—not an excess of reason, but a deficiency thereof. Burke's conservatism similarly suffers from clinging to a totalitarian presupposition. It denies abstract human rights, rejects individual liberty and democratic suffrage for the English populace, and upholds the divine right of kings, hereditary nobility, patriarchal authority, and the legitimacy of the established church—a totalitarian conservatism steeped in theoretical and moral obscurantism. We know that Plato, Aristotle, and Confucius advocated for higher spiritual values transcending the realities of power, such as "God is the measure of all things," the supremacy of rule by law over rule by man, or the veneration of cultural virtue. Compared to them, Burke's conservatism remains stuck at the level of uncritical affirmation of the existing power order, revealing its obvious inadequacy in terms of value hierarchy and taste. This explains why Burke never elevated the Whig principles he once championed to a conservative standard.

Burke once stated, "Jurisprudence, the pride of human intellect, despite its flaws, complexities, and errors, is the collective wisdom of generations." This appears to be Burke's positive and concrete answer to what conservatism should preserve: extracting wisdom and reason from tradition, conserving the collective wisdom passed down through generations, with the British common law tradition serving as a classic example. Although the British experience is clearly inapplicable to other nations, it may serve as a benchmark for understanding why traditional wisdom is worth preserving.

VI. What is the theoretical significance of the decline of the British Liberal Party?

From the obscurantism of Burke's holistic conservative outlook, we can see that the first generation of conservative theory was not pro-individual liberty but anti-individual liberty.

After Burke, the British suffered greatly in their efforts to preserve tradition. The rigidly conservative policy package implemented by the Young Pitt during the French Revolution severely stifled Britain's vitality. For decades thereafter, opposition to reform—even minor change—became the dominant tendency in British politics. During the early and mid-19th

century, most proactive reforms in Britain were spearheaded by the Whig Party and its successor, the Liberal Party. As the bearers of liberal political practice, the Whigs and Liberals represented Britain's reformist and progressive faction. Liberalism during this period positioned itself as a competitor to conservatism, manifesting as a moderate form of radicalism: the movement for religious freedom outside the Church of England, the campaign for universal suffrage, the free trade debate, and in the latter half of the 19th century, national independence movements and the women's suffrage movement—all were led or significantly advanced by the liberal camp. Britain thus became the pioneer and champion of humanity's newest liberal ideals, securing a moral high ground. Throughout the 19th century, holistic conservatism suffered successive defeats and gradually adopted certain liberal values to avoid being expelled from the historical stage. Constitutional thinker Zhang Qianfan's observation that "liberalism propels conservative forces forward, while conservatism restrains the pace of progress, preventing it from stumbling due to excessive speed" aptly describes 19th-century British party politics.

Liberalism primarily manifested as value rationality, while conservatism leaned more toward instrumental rationality. It seemed natural for liberalism to guide the continuous evolution of conservatism.

Paradoxically, the British Liberal Party—which embodied value-rationality and represented liberalism's political manifestation—declined precipitously by the early 20th century, fading from Britain's major political stage. Meanwhile, the Conservative Party, adhering solely to instrumental rationality and perpetually "tagging along" in the marathon of value-ideology, endured as a perennial force. Why?

Scholars worldwide have offered various insightful analyses. In my view, since 1829, the British Conservative Party has upheld a flexible conservative mindset within a free society, avoiding the trap of absolute conservative dogmatism. Amidst the turbulent transformations of the 19th century, the Conservatives ultimately abandoned totalitarian worldviews in favor of pluralistic structuralism. New ideas pioneered by their liberal rivals were often appropriated by the Conservatives as core tenets of their own platform. This dual wielding of conservative and liberal principles paradoxically gave the Conservatives a greater competitive edge than their

opponents. By the latter half of the 19th century, the Liberal Party—clinging to aristocratic arrogance, pursuing misguided political alliances, and especially falling into the dogmatic trap of laissez-faire liberalism—saw its social and ideological foundations hollowed out by its two main rivals, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. The divergent fates of the Conservatives and Liberals demonstrate that dogmatism leads to marginalization, while ideological hollowness leads to disintegration.

The theoretical significance of the British Liberal Party's decline lies in its role as one of the strongest arguments for the necessity of political conservatism. Statistically speaking, conservative political factions often succeed in preserving themselves precisely because they abandon totalizing worldviews. Liberal political factions, as pioneers and aggressors, bear heavier burdens that increasingly outweigh their gains. They inherently face severe internal instability and survival pressures far greater than their rivals, making them particularly in need of balanced negative feedback. This implies not only achieving a balance between freedom and conservatism in the offensive, but first and foremost, that conservatism is the strategic priority—the primary concern, with survival as the paramount consideration. Conservatism is the most potent means of survival. Regarding core values, core representation, and core social foundations, one must defend them with unyielding resolve. This is the essence of survival preservation—a principle that must never be abandoned under any circumstances. Conservatism should also be resilient—a pragmatic survival strategy that not only achieves preservation but also enables value enhancement through experimentation with new ways of life. Given this, liberalism's optimal trajectory may be to retreat, in the long term, into some form of conservatism after vigorous, innovative, and progressive institutional advancement. Britain's current two-party system may not represent competition between more liberal and more conservative factions, but rather between one form of conservatism and another.

Philosophical Reflections on Conservatism (III)

The establishment of America's "separation of powers" system, though arguably the most novel and original institutional revolution in human history, was achieved through a Confucian-style "synthesis of institutions." Late 19th-century American liberal culture seemed to encompass more than mere "classical liberalism." Goldwater's philosophical argumentation was so pure and sophisticated that it elevated American-style conservatism—conservative yet oriented toward active individualism—to the level of a philosophical vantage point.

VII. How to Distinguish Conservatism and Radicalism in the American Revolution?

America's system of "separation of powers" appears to be the first institutional design in human history, marked by reflection, choice, and deliberate construction. Yet this deliberate construction is by no means purely theoretical or totalitarian.

The first natural consequence of the American Revolution was that it emerged as the offspring of its British civilizational mother—a new generation rooted in the traditions of British common law (essentially a customary law) and parliamentary governance.

As Hannah Arendt observed, "Historically, the most significant and decisive difference between the American Revolution and the French Revolution lies in the fact that the former was the historical legacy of limited monarchy, while the latter was the legacy of absolutism." One of the primary reasons for the American Revolution's historic success was its refusal to abandon the political civilization of its mother country, instead building upon its predecessors through revolutionary improvement.

Prior to the Revolution, the Thirteen Colonies had implemented a dual system of power between governors and assemblies, with power limitation as its core convention. The judiciary primarily followed the British common law tradition, but colonial assemblies (sometimes alongside governors)

functioned as the highest courts, making it difficult for the lower courts to avoid entanglement in local partisan struggles. Following victory in the Revolutionary War, the new system—largely modeled on Montesquieu's concept of the "separation of powers"—achieved three key innovations: First, it pushed the separation of powers to its extreme by creating entirely new institutions: an independent executive branch headed by a president and an independent Supreme Court. Second, it maximized procedural checks and balances between the president and the two branches of Congress. Third, it ensured that both the head of the executive branch and legislators were entirely elected. Subsequently, in political practice, following the inherent logic of "all men are created equal," it gradually progressed toward universal suffrage and direct elections for all positions—essentially the full realization of popular sovereignty. Fourth, within judicial practice, the inherent logic of the complete separation of powers swiftly gave rise to judicial review, establishing the judiciary's supreme balancing authority. The Supreme Court and the entire court system became the primary counterweight in the interplay between the people and the government, as well as between different levels of government. Thus, after decades of incremental institutional revolution, the American system achieved a level of sophistication and perfection in its legislative, executive, judicial, and electoral pillars that surpassed even its original theoretical design, approaching near-ideal perfection.

However, federalism was "less than ideal"—to secure the Constitution's ratification, compromises had to be made with several slaveholding states regarding slavery, a system violating the principle of "all men are created equal" and profoundly inhumane. This reflected a conservative tendency in the institutional design. This was a misguided conservatism, as the "buyout option" was overlooked (slavery never existed in Britain itself). The failure to establish a timetable for abolishing slavery compounded this immoral conservatism, later sparking severe internal conflict that culminated in the Civil War, claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of white Americans and subjecting countless Black people to prolonged suffering, enslavement, and racial discrimination. Yet another dimension of federalism—the conservatism toward state power and individual sovereignty defined by the Tenth Amendment: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the

Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people"—served as the legal bedrock for sustaining a diverse, decentralized structure that restrained central authority and fostered a society with minimal constraints and maximum liberty.

International academia has debated whether Hamilton or Jefferson was the conservative figure of the American Revolutionary era.

In my view, both men's political philosophies contained profoundly conservative elements. Jefferson's advocacy for "states' rights" represented a vigorous defense of the tradition of thirteen separate, autonomous states that existed before and after the American Revolution. On this issue, Hamilton's proposal to introduce a monarchical "presidential system" appeared quite "radical" in contrast to the political reality of "parliamentary rule" that had emerged since the Revolution. In terms of political procedure, the presidential system was designed to counterbalance popular democracy and mob rule. Specifically, the president was positioned as a check on the legislature—then merely a trend rather than a reality—which supposedly embodied popular democracy. This institutional arrangement transformed the prevailing "parliamentary rule" into "presidential rule," representing a significant evolutionary advancement over the British parliamentary system. America's founding fathers frequently emphasized that their political system was republican rather than democratic. Etymologically, Athenian "democracy" originally meant rule by the majority, while Roman "republic" referred to public sovereignty, vaguely implying rule by all citizens. This republican ideology not only inherited the spirit of the Roman Republic—a noble-led polity governed by law—but also responded to the classical democratic revisionism championed by Plato and Aristotle, which advocated "captain's responsibility" and revered mixed governments. Viewed thus, Hamilton's vision of moderate centralization within a democratic framework rearticulated the conservative essence of classical democratic revisionism, which revered elite governance.

In fact, when designing the constitutional system, the Founding Fathers drew extensively from the successes and failures of dozens of Western democratic republics over two millennia, creatively incorporating their most agreeable elements—though the primary influences remained the Roman Republic and the British parliamentary system. The theory and practice of

popular sovereignty—the election of all legislators and executive leaders, later extended to direct popular elections—represented the most radical elements of the American Revolution. Yet even this amounted to nothing more than the active preservation and universal extension of Britain's established tradition of indirect democratic elections. On the surface, Montesquieu's "separation of powers" doctrine—which served as the blueprint for the system's design—appears to stem from a theoretical conception. Yet when articulating this principle, Montesquieu's mental prototype was British experience. In essence, it represented a reworking of that experience—an empirical construction rather than a purely theoretical one.

Thus, while America's establishment of the "separation of powers" system stands as one of the most novel and original institutional revolutions in human history, it was achieved through a Confucian-style synthesis of institutional traditions. The American Revolution was, overall, a moderately radical revolution. It's true that conservative family identity belonged to the Confucian tradition of institutional synthesis, not the Burkean tradition of concrete conservative forms.

Revolutionaries are inherently radical. Compared to the realities of his time, Hamilton seemed closer to instrumental radicalism. Yet his approach of balancing state powers with measured centralization proved effective in enhancing administrative efficiency, significantly advancing America's prosperity through practical results. Jefferson's radicalism, however, was substantive. His grand ideals—such as "all men are created equal" and the full realization of popular sovereignty—have frequently been criticized by fundamentalist liberals over the past century, condemned as akin to the French Revolution's approach of "subjugating liberty with equality." Yet this represents a profound misunderstanding of Jefferson's thought. The "demystification of the ideal of equality" was a dogmatic fashion of the 20th century, but America's three centuries of institutional practice have long disproved it. One of the theoretical pivots lies in how we understand Jefferson's originality and radicalism.

Jefferson's ideal of equality primarily concerns comprehensive equality (affirmation and protection) of fundamental freedoms, such as individual property rights, personal rights, and political rights—it is by no means

economic egalitarianism. While the young Jefferson harbored revolutionary romanticism as a tool and embraced "popular democracy" in the sense of parliamentary rule, the older Jefferson, recalling the horrors of mob rule witnessed during his French mission, gradually came to embrace the idea of effectively restraining "popular democracy." He shifted toward advocating a theory of "natural aristocracy," which corresponded to a cautious affirmation of constitutional checks and balances among the upper echelons. His systematic ideas on preserving state sovereignty and substantive individual sovereignty, along with promoting the autonomy of district republics, though clumsy in conceptual articulation, constituted a great original contribution to political theory. In terms of intellectual sources, this originality can be seen as an inheritance and synthesis of the ideas of the Levellers in the 1640 English Revolution (whose thought was actually one of the primary sources of Locke's ideas), and the democratic sovereignty ideas of Locke and Rousseau. It represents an authentic conservative synthesis and elevation of the practical experiences of British-American indirect democracy and direct democracy (such as New England township self-governance), while also offering a highly original theoretical exposition on the mid-level to grassroots institutional arrangements for popular sovereignty.

The universal suffrage promoted by Jackson and others in the 1820s represented an extension of Jefferson's political ideals—the full realization of "all men are created equal" and popular sovereignty—thus establishing a new "value tradition" indigenous to America: an authentic American democracy. Madison's constitutional checks and balances and his theory of democracy for the masses certainly constitute another vital intellectual source of authentic American democracy. However, his core concerns remained somewhat confined to institutional arrangements, failing to lay the groundwork for fundamental individual political rights. The task of establishing an individualist foundation for the "separation of powers" system and forging the "value tradition" of authentic American democracy was accomplished by Jefferson, not Madison. It was Jefferson, not Madison, who first championed the universal equality of individual liberty, propelling the separation of powers toward universal suffrage, popular sovereignty, and individual sovereignty—the pinnacle of modern humanitarian political civilization. If Madison is the principal "lamp-maker" of authentic American

democracy (which still somewhat exaggerates his contribution), Jefferson is its genuine "lamp-bearer." Hamilton, of course, lingered in the realm of practical governance, remaining outside the gates of the "value tradition." The radical explorations of revolutionaries yielded the value-based achievements that became the ideological origin of healthy political conservatism in later generations.

At the level of political practice, the Democratic-Republican Party, founded by Jefferson and Madison, advocated for the preservation of state rights, prioritized the interests of farmers, and opposed excessive centralization. This defense of state sovereignty was, in essence, a call for small government. By contrast, while Hamilton's Federalist Party was certainly correct in its radical reform proposals—such as establishing a central bank and vigorously promoting manufacturing—its vision of expanding power to build a strong central government, especially a powerful military, seemed overly aggressive.—One key secret behind America's sustained rapid economic growth for over a century after the Revolution lay in maintaining a small, medieval-style British-style army while steadfastly avoiding involvement in European hegemonic wars. This allowed national wealth to be primarily channeled into developing and upgrading the domestic market economy.

Thus, in the early days of the nation, the American version of conservative thought had not yet emerged. Hamilton, who advocated for the federal government's continuous expansion of power, was not a conservative; Jefferson and Jackson, who championed states' rights and small government, were not radicals either. Yet, the political platforms of both parties they founded leaned toward conservatism and moderation.

VIII. In which historical phases did American conservatism emerge, take shape, and mature?

Early American conservatism primarily centered on preserving state rights and agricultural interests. However, by the mid-19th century, the theme of state rights was co-opted by Southern Democrats to defend the legitimacy of slavery. At this juncture, the dominant conservative current in American society became the Democratic Party's defense of slavery and its corresponding preservation of a form of white supremacy—a reactionary and inhumane conservatism.

The Republican Party, founded by Lincoln and others, inherited the political tradition advocating for small government. Yet in economic and social affairs, they aligned with the radical faction of their era: echoing the radical line of Britain's Whig Party, they championed the defense of the national free market, curbed the expansion of slavery, and promoted universally shared humanity, equality, and liberty. Radical liberal movements of the time, such as the abolitionist cause, became strategic allies of the Republicans. During the American Civil War, Lincoln was compelled to expand executive powers in several areas to meet urgent needs. One manifestation of Republican restraint was the postwar reduction of the Union Army from over one million troops to just 30,000.

Throughout the 19th century, American society seemed unable to shake off its spiritual and cultural dependence on its mother country, England. The true ideological (rather than behavioral) conservatism in America seems to have taken root after the Civil War. At that time, two major social currents imported from Britain—the philosophy of laissez-faire liberalism, imbued with a strong social Darwinist character, and the pietistic religious movements of the nonconformist denominations—stimulated Americans to reflect on their own traditional spiritual and cultural heritage.

Academics generally refer to laissez-faire philosophy as "classical liberalism." Sufficient historical evidence demonstrates that the American culture of freedom in the late 19th century encompassed more than just "classical liberalism."

Having never experienced hereditary aristocracy and blessed with vast expanses of land, the New World remained economically vibrant. Abundant resources and favorable export conditions sustained high wages for its people over the long term. Even on the eve of the Revolution, while poverty existed in American society, destitution was absent. As the frontier expanded westward, the federal government distributed land to settlers at virtually no cost, fostering a system of equitable private land ownership. For the first time in human history, the realistic possibility of "equal opportunity" emerged for the entire population. Correspondingly, a philosophy of life emphasizing individual striving, free competition, and self-governance became the dominant social and cultural ethos. It is well known that mainstream American culture has always encouraged political ambition ("ambition

against ambition") and economic self-reliance. Yet people often overlook a crucial incentive mechanism: The American legal system, through the creation of patent law, corporate law, and others, significantly reduced the scope of liability for individual economic ventures ("limited liability") while greatly expanding the potential rewards of risk-taking (patents effectively embody a "first-mover advantage"). This has substantially augmented the economic freedom and scale of economic power available to individuals under universal rules. Given that judicial independence essentially constitutes "the socialization of the judiciary," we can more precisely describe this legal empowerment of individual economic ventures as "social empowerment" rather than "governmental empowerment."The legal incentives provided by patent law and corporate law for individual economic ventures represent the most elegant aspect of the common law tradition. Throughout the entire 19th century, the American legal system continuously encouraged personal risk-taking and free competition, consciously adapting and paving the way for the nation's economic prosperity. (Later attempts at "trust" legislation, which overreached in expanding individual power and stifled free competition, prompted a legal retrenchment.)

Thus, America's culture of individual striving and free competition possesses a weighty legal substance beyond the economic conservatism of "classical liberalism"—which advocates Adam Smith's "invisible hand" or Hayek's "spontaneous order." Individuals engaging in economic ventures are not atomized entities left to fend for themselves beyond government safeguards for personal safety and transactional order. Rather, they are "civilized individuals" continuously empowered by society (including the state) through legal frameworks. This tangibly demonstrates to Americans that the law is their law, society is their society, and they are the true masters and sovereigns of that society. Legend has it that in the ancient tribal era of freedom, each person was a force unto themselves, empowered by kinship alliances and personal strength. Now, in American civil society, each person has once again become a force unto themselves, empowered by law and personal endeavor.

For the vibrant lived experience of American citizens, the theoretical language of "classical liberalism" proves inadequate. Not only does it fail to capture the enduring empowerment of individual striving and free

competition within American legal civilization, but its subject matter—essentially referring to collective order or pluralistic, flat structures—cannot affirm the groundbreaking significance of the original breakthrough in free individual life within American society:In the vibrant lived experience of the American people, what transcends mere notions of "laissez-faire" or "small government" is a comprehensive, proactive individualist value system—a social ethos that champions personal striving and self-governance. This ethos has gradually crystallized into America's indigenous customs and mainstream way of life, forming the very bedrock of its free order.

The introduction of laissez-faire philosophy prompted Americans to reflect on their nation's two-century tradition of individualistic economic practices. This reflective culture found public expression through a lexicon of substantively aligned terms—such as "individual endeavor," "equality of opportunity" (rather than equality of outcome), and "the American Dream"—that gradually crystallized into a national consensus and a mainstream cultural narrative. Lifestyle culture was elevated to theoretical culture, and spontaneous positive individualism transformed into conscious positive individualism. Thus, America's unique social and cultural tradition took shape under external influences. With tradition came something to preserve. Of course, this tradition of individual striving and self-governance appears to have never fully shed the callous tendencies of social Darwinism that infiltrated from Britain in the late 19th century. This is starkly evident in the severely inadequate moral response of American society to the mass deaths of elderly individuals during the 2020 pandemic.

The religious pluralism movement and the rise of nonconformist denominations in 18th-19th-century Britain sparked two major revivals across the Atlantic in America: movements advocating a return to original Christianity, urging Christians to uphold traditional morality, and advocating a life of pure conscience. During the early and mid-19th century, the Christian evangelical movement developed within both the Anglican and non-conformist denominations in Britain. It emphasized the personal relationship between individual Christians and Jesus Christ, linking community with faith. In the 1870s, American evangelicalism surged rapidly, marking the third great religious revival.

While evangelicalism offered forceful critiques of moral decay and

corruption amid urbanization and industrialization, its doctrine inherited and revitalized Anglo-American Puritan traditions. It emphasized the direct spiritual connection between individual Christians and Christ, effectively placing believers in a subject position of spiritual autonomy, free from intermediary intervention. Organizationally, evangelical churches adopted a loose, flat structure with minimal central authority. Thus, while evangelicals continually delivered moral "taps" against individualism driven by desire and self-interest, they remained fundamentally compatible with American-style positive individualism.

The American culture of individual striving and self-governance implicitly carries a spontaneous belief in innate goodness. Over the course of two centuries, this positive individualism has legitimized certain desires. Yet as a structural ethical presence in American society, the Christian church has continually imposed boundaries on this secular legitimization of desire. In a sense, the three great religious revivals can be seen as moral counterbalances to the American culture of individual striving and self-governance in economic life. The late 19th-century American temperance movement represented a collective evangelical counterattack against modern society's excessive liberties. This campaign, which gained significant momentum with the Republican Party's support, ultimately failed. It demonstrated the limitations of religious intervention in secular life within a society of separation of church and state. Yet evangelicalism did not decline as a result. It not only continually pulled Americans toward moral boundaries through religious self-discipline and restraint, but also elevated believers along the lines of America's traditional culture—the Puritan tradition—toward a more pure and noble spiritual realm of faith. Thus, the values of individual striving and the Puritan cultural tradition form two intersecting strands that constitute core elements of America's fundamental tradition. These two elements represent the most quintessentially American cultural expressions, embodying the nation's spiritual heights and perhaps also its limits of exploration.

The above describes the gestation period of American conservatism. Its emergence first manifested itself in the 1930s as a political backlash by Republicans against the "New Deal." To counter the Great Depression, Democratic President Roosevelt implemented reforms he believed were

necessary to address the partial failure of free-market capitalism. He expanded the role of government to advance social security, labor equality, and large-scale public works projects to boost employment. This drew fierce opposition from conservative Republicans, led by William Howard Taft. They revived the ideology of small government, identifying themselves as classical "liberals." However, since the term "liberalism" had been appropriated by Roosevelt and the progressives, they were compelled to adopt a new label—"conservatism"—to define their political stance. Thus, conservatism formally emerged as a distinct political school and theoretical framework on the American historical stage.

During the 1930s, President Roosevelt engaged in several confrontations with conservative justices on the Supreme Court, resulting in several New Deal laws and programs being ruled unconstitutional. Although the justices ultimately prevailed in their battles with Roosevelt, and Taft suffered repeated defeats in his presidential campaigns, the conservative political ideological camp began to coalesce.

Following World War II, American conservatism embarked on systematic theoretical development. The anti-communist fervor ignited by the Cold War spurred a renewed emphasis on neoclassical liberalism's critique of totalitarianism in the United States, while also propelling the religious conservative movement against atheism. Both foundational elements of America's core traditions were formally integrated into conservative theory during this period. In 1953, historian James Kirk's The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana systematically examined Anglo-American conservative thought since Burke, advocating respect for traditional order—particularly the role of institutions such as religion, family, and guilds. Kirk's effort to synthesize conservative theory is credited with giving American conservatism—previously an "amorphous, fragmented opposition to liberalism"—a "common mind."

Yet politically, conservatism remained fragile. Amid the civil rights revolution and the peak of big government in the 1960s, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater stepped forward to champion conservative statesmanship and small government. Goldwater's 1960 book, The Conscience of a Conservative, echoed Kirk's title. The Mind of Conservatism, and these two works coincidentally formed the twin peaks of American conservative

theory.

Goldwater wrote: "The primary responsibility of a political thinker must surely be to understand human nature. ... The first thing he must grasp about man is that each human being is a unique living entity, and that man's most precious possession is his individual soul—a soul that possesses both an immortal and a mortal aspect. The mortal aspect establishes his absolute difference from any other human individual. A philosophy can only be considered natural if it takes into account the essential differences between individuals and provides conditions for the development of each person's unique potential. In our era, we hear too much talk of the 'common man,' a notion that pays scant heed to the history of nations—nations that have grown mighty through the pioneering spirit and soaring ambitions of extraordinary individuals. Conservatives know that treating a person as part of an undifferentiated mass is, in fact, to condemn him to the ultimate slavery."

This constitutes a philosophical foundation for one of America's fundamental indigenous traditions: the value of individual striving. The absolute uniqueness—the absolute distinctiveness—of each person is the starting point for their journey toward glory and excellence. This philosophical argument is so pure and elevated that it places the American version of conservatism—conserving the values of active individualism—firmly on the philosophical high ground.

Goldwater repeatedly emphasized that the political stance of conservatism rests upon the principles of human nature and divine law—that is, natural law. This conservative tone is highly rational, not Burkean mysticism or obscurantism, which explains its immense persuasive power for Americans. Over four years, the book went through more than twenty printings, ultimately selling 3.5 million copies.

Goldwater positioned his ideas as applying conservative principles to political practice, proposing a conservative political blueprint that included "states' rights, tax cuts, voluntary social insurance, and a strong military." From this point onward, conservatism entered American political practice. Around this time, the American conservative movement articulated several fundamental political principles, including individual autonomy, personal initiative, states' rights, small government, the Puritan tradition, family,

community, constitutional democracy, and the common law tradition. After decades of vacillation amid radical liberal reforms, the Republican Party finally affirmed its core values and fundamental political direction. Historically, Goldwater stands as the authentic founder of America's political right wing.

American conservatism was named by Taft, elevated to mainstream political thought by Goldwater, and later spread widely under Reagan (in recent years, it has somewhat subjectively relied on the highly controversial Trump to advance various social visions) —— This demonstrates that conservatism, anchored in respect for established order, possesses a deep-seated dependency on politicians and political strategists. This dependency may inherently limit conservatism's capacity for independence, originality, intellectual freedom, and critical rationality.

Goldwater-style conservatism also suffers from a major flaw: it failed to rearticulate and revive another core element of America's foundational tradition—Puritan conservatism.

Philosophical Reflections on Conservatism (IV)

IX. How to Assess the Historical Contributions and Major Failures of Reagan Conservatism?

The radical social reforms championed by the Democratic Party in the 1960s, sustained student protests against the Vietnam War, and the increasingly extreme exploration of leftist new lifestyles fueled deep public anxiety over the erosion of traditional morality. Republican and realist politician Nixon keenly sensed this public backlash. By championing patriotism, law and order, traditional values, and opposing drugs, abortion, and homosexuality, he secured victory in the 1968 presidential election with a conservative platform.

This marked the Republican Party's first systematic "shift to the right." However, Nixon's rightward turn fell short on key issues, such as drastically cutting welfare spending and continuing affirmative action to promote equal opportunity. The Republican establishment formally embraced orthodox conservatism only after Ronald Reagan—the political and ideological heir to Barry Goldwater—won the presidency in 1980.

Reagan implemented supply-side economic policies—essentially a small-government approach applied to the economy. By reducing barriers to production and services, cutting government spending, lowering taxes, deregulating industries, and controlling the money supply, he successfully resolved over a decade of persistent inflation. Since a significant portion of U.S. Social Security is funded directly by businesses, tax cuts substantially boosted corporate vitality (the economic growth achieved by Trump's massive tax cuts in recent years stemmed from this same principle). Deregulation effectively fostered free competition among businesses. Concurrently, financial liberalization enabled the free flow of capital, providing a powerful boost to the bold innovations of high-tech enterprises. This created an optimal institutional environment for the American information technology revolution of the 1990s. This "Reaganomics," which made immense contributions to the U.S. economy and reached its historical

peak, is essentially a novel theory of free competition achieved through a series of subtractions that enabled additions. It can indeed be regarded as a modern version of economic conservatism. In a sense, it also demonstrated the "productivity" of the "authentic conservative" political line.

One of Hayek's key operational innovations as a leading neoclassical liberal thinker was to criticize unions' use of coercive tactics during strikes as illegal violations of individual liberty. Inspired by this, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher progressively cracked down on strike-prone unions during her administration, securing multiple victories in repeated "arm-wrestling" contests with labor. Reagan drew lessons from Thatcher's experience. When confronting the U.S. air traffic controllers' union strike, he decisively dismissed over 11,000 federal employees serving as air traffic controllers. This move was widely regarded as the most significant blow to "the collective bargaining power of American workers and the American labor movement" in decades. Given the historically heavy social security burdens on American businesses, unions' persistent demands for high wages during labor negotiations—driven by narrow collective interests—had indeed significantly compressed corporate profit margins and dampened investment expansion. Reagan's hardline approach thus possessed a certain rationality, allowing it to endure for decades. However, this political subtraction inadvertently triggered major shifts in the domestic political landscape: With their economic bargaining power severely weakened, unions lost their cohesive force over the working class, drastically diminishing their ability to mobilize votes as a left-wing electoral intermediary. To ensure its political survival, the Democratic Party—a party reliant on electoral support—was compelled to shift its grassroots mobilization efforts toward high-tech professionals and diverse ethnic networks.

Politically, Reagan countered the skepticism and demoralization stemming from Vietnam's defeat by championing the "America is great" theme. As a hardliner, he maintained Cold War policies, bolstered defense spending, and sustained pressure on the Soviet Union. His repeated patriotic proclamations and proactive foreign policy revitalized a generation's sense of national pride. Yet Reagan's patriotism was sophisticated, simultaneously emphasizing skepticism toward government."Government is not the solution

to our problems; government is the problem." "We place faith and family, not government and bureaucracy, at the center of American life. For in America, we worship not government, but God."" At the ideological level, Reagan viewed the essence of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War as a clash between two core values: individualism versus state supremacy. For "those living under the shadow of totalitarianism," "as long as they continue to champion the supremacy of the state, proclaim its omnipotence over the individual, and prophesy its ultimate rule over all mankind, they are the center of evil in the modern world. The crushing of individual rights by state supremacy—this was the original meaning behind Reagan's coined term "evil empire."

The individualism Reagan upheld inherited the traditional American emphasis on personal autonomy, yet differed from Goldwater's primary focus on "the absolute uniqueness of the individual." Reagan's version seemed to place greater stress on the individual's responsibilities within the collective, specifically within the church and the family. Reagan cited a study by a Washington-based research council which concluded that Americans were far more religious than people in other nations. Ninety-five percent of respondents professed belief in God, and the vast majority believed the Ten Commandments held real meaning in their lives. Another study found an overwhelming majority of Americans disapproved of adultery, teenage sex, pornography, abortion, and drugs. These consistent findings reveal a deep respect for the importance of family bonds and religious faith."America's greatness is found among you, your families, churches, neighborhoods, and communities. God is the essence of our lives, and the individual family is the core of society." "We must be cautious when declaring God is on our side, for we must first answer: Are we on God's side?" Responsibility and mission, sacredness and greatness—these core elements of Puritan tradition found modern expression through Reagan's words. Reagan thus filled the structural void in the orthodox conservatism of the Gideons regarding Puritan cultural traditions.

Evangelicals, having provided strong support for Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, gained entry into the Republican Party's crucial social base. While this seemed somewhat utilitarian at first, over time the evangelicals demonstrated their inherent vitality—evident, for instance, in their moral reformation of the rebellious young George W. Bush.Since the

civil rights revolution of the 1950s, America's leftist exploration of new ways of life seemed to have gone too far, creating an objective need in American society for moral and traditional balance.Evangelicals, emphasizing religious devotion while advocating active engagement in social and political life through religious values, emerged as a timely force. Regarding voting patterns, the British long recognized that religious identification proves more potent than class identity. This pattern repeated itself in America, from Reagan to George W. Bush. Since the 1980s, driven by religious factors, America's grassroots population has increasingly favored Republican candidates, causing a significant shift in the nation's political spectrum. As a club-like electoral party, the Republican Party itself, like the Democrats, suffers from weak grassroots support. By proactively serving as an electoral intermediary, the Christian right appears poised to become an invisible part of the Republican Party's foundational structure. The permeation of religion into politics is redefining the very nature of American political parties.

Advocating for small government, free competition, and individual autonomy; implementing tax cuts, spending reductions, and deregulation; championing patriotism, American greatness, and a strong national defense; exalting the advantages of liberal democracy to defend Western culture against totalitarianism; reviving traditional religion and family ethics to curb the excessive libertarian exploration of "moral relativism"—these elements constitute the orthodoxy of Goldwater-Reagan American conservatism. Through Reagan's passionate, practice-oriented advocacy and the institutional establishment's amplification, it gradually expanded from academic thought and political theory into a pervasive public consciousness and dominant political operational orientation during the 1980s.

The positive contributions of Reagan conservatism to American society are widely acknowledged, yet its negative impacts are often overlooked or underestimated, despite being profoundly far-reaching:

(1) Reagan's conservatism appealed more to the public's natural sentiments toward patriotism and religious traditions, possessing strong social and spiritual appeal. However, its philosophical foundations still lacked sufficient academic justification and necessary intellectual originality.

Reagan's conservative focus lay not in Goldwater's active individualist

values and lifestyle, but in Burkean and Kirkian collective entities—the nation, church, family, and community (though Kirk tended toward de-emphasizing government, while Goldwater stressed patriotism and "imperial glory"). Overall, Reagan's conservative ideology featured a dualism between Kirk's corporatism and Goldwater's individual supremacy. How to resolve the inherent conflict between these two poles? Reagan neither fully grasped nor articulated a clear solution. This prevented his conservatism from rearticulating the essence of America's 19th-century values of individual striving and from ascending to the philosophical high ground of active individualism.

Under Reagan, the emphasis on "huddling together for warmth" and retreating into tradition was pronounced, yet the American values of individual striving that inspired the world were subtly diminished. This constituted the greatest structural flaw in Reagan's conservative ideology. Reagan's intellectual stature ultimately fell short of Goldwater's, a deficiency often stemming from insufficient depth.

(2) Reagan's conservatism placed insufficient emphasis on fully empirically grounded scientific rationality and self-critical philosophical rationality. To some extent, it even harbored latent weaknesses in rationality, requiring ideological and religious beliefs to compensate for them.

One of Reagan's most enduring legacies was opening the door for religious influence in politics. He stated: "When the Founding Fathers adopted the First Amendment, they were seeking to protect churches from government interference. They never intended to erect a hostile wall between government and religious belief." This statement overlooks the institutional sophistication and immense practical advantages of the 19th-century American system that shielded government from religious interference. It effectively blurs the red line separating church and state. The social phenomenon of American right-wing voters becoming increasingly kind, pure, and reserved over the past four decades of evangelical growth itself attests to the profound and enduring social and moral shaping power of the Puritan tradition. However, the situation becomes extraordinarily complex once entering the political realm: the virtue of Christian right involvement in political life lies in its grassroots, traditional, and self-restrained orientation; yet its flaw is its inherent bias. When citizens select public servants, they are

often guided to prioritize candidates' party affiliations and religious beliefs over thorough information, robust debate, rational evidence, and persuasion. This has increasingly driven American electoral culture toward image-building and cognitive irrationality.

The ideological polarization of politics and religion has overshadowed the free-thinking movement, representing one of the greatest flaws of American conservatism since the 1980s. Some attribute the problem solely to Trump, but it represents an overarching trend since Reagan and George W. Bush—a rightward shift that increasingly deviates from the authentic right-wing tradition of American positive individualism. Is this a blessing or a curse for the American people? Can American society find the modern boundary of the separation of church and state? We may need to wait another thirty years to see.

Monotheistic religions pursue a sanctified spiritual life, demanding intense inward focus. Yet secular existence inevitably requires compromise, balance, and tolerance. Thus, secular life inherently involves constant compromise, while religious life embodies a highly conscious rigor and radical emotional intensity. The core of religious salvation lies in self-redemption; even in spiritual matters, it can only assist others, not save them. This is the essence of religious autonomy. In modern pluralistic civilizations, religious rigidity cannot be imposed to regulate secular society. Religion must be separated from politics, and political conservatism must be grounded in rational conservatism. Otherwise, it inevitably descends into obscurantism, dogmatism, and some form of collectivist coercion.

The true greatness of Christian culture lies in its achievement of a proper balance between rational conservatism and faith-based conservatism. We can discern the original Christian culture's grand vision and inherent openness merely from the fact that the New Testament was first written in Greek, integrating the core essence of Greek tragedy—an art form standing at the pinnacle of ancient civilization—and Greek philosophy. In the information age, drifting toward obscurantism, dogmatism, and closed conservatism is absolutely not the authentic path of Christian culture.

(3) Reagan's patriotism, while avoiding the dangers of collectivism, did not escape the trap of "imperial power and glory."

Reagan's invocation of "American greatness" certainly prioritized

pride in America's liberal democratic system and religious heritage, yet it also ambiguously conveyed a sense of glory and military supremacy. The "imperial covenant" is regarded as one of the emerging national consensuses in the United States since World War II. Throughout millennia, no nation has willingly relinquished military supremacy, nor has any hegemonic power escaped the cancer of "imperial expansion overextending to devour itself." The root cause lies in the collective incentives and resource allocation mechanisms inherent in imperial power structures, which inevitably foster a "split focus"—a coexistence of external and internal priorities that cannot be reconciled or balanced. This duality ultimately leads to an inversion of priorities, hollowing out the nation's foundational strength.

America's isolationist tradition, which became a pejorative term during WWII, was actually one of the primary drivers of its 19th-century prosperity. After WWI, the U.S. could still reduce its temporarily mobilized expeditionary force of millions to just 60,000 troops. Post-WWII, a new tradition of "imperial power and glory" emerged, with America assuming the role of one of the world's two major military hegemonies—bringing both glory and calamity. The Vietnam War defeat plunged American society into a period of profound reflection, where self-doubt harbored certain positive elements. Yet Reagan's simplistic chant of "America's greatness," coupled with military buildup and external intervention, yielded clever gains. The unexpected windfall from the Soviet Union's self-collapse led to a severe lack of nationwide reflection on the strategic prudence needed to restrain imperial impulses and values such as humanitarian peace defense. The faster and higher the unipolar dominance of the 1990s rose, the more severely the United States paid the price of a divided nation for the "glory of imperial power."

From Reagan to George W. Bush, the new tradition of "imperial covenant" completely overwhelmed the old tradition of isolationism. Some American scholars once touted the unstable and inherently unsustainable "unipolar world" as a new paradigm for "American exceptionalism." This was, in fact, a radical fantasy. The isolationist version of "American exceptionalism" was essentially pacifist, avoiding involvement in bloody foreign conflicts and tedious domestic power struggles. Some claim America can never return to its former ways. Not necessarily! Have we not witnessed

how the conservative Trump could partially revert to the old tradition in isolation—refraining from launching a single war over four years, and even prioritizing troop withdrawals as he neared the end of his term? In my view, Biden's rationality, coolness, and seasoned wisdom will inevitably follow suit.

From an outsider's perspective, America's military and intelligence apparatus has grown excessively bloated, while its administrative, economic, and domestic emergency response systems remain alarmingly weak. To address internal crises and external threats, the U.S. urgently needs a new "Hamiltonianism" to vigorously strengthen its manufacturing sector. Its administrative structure also seems ripe for establishing a Hamilton-style "economic prime minister" position (though expanding the Treasury Secretary's authority could achieve similar results). Viewed through the lens of grand historical perspective, the United States—possessing the optimal tripartite separation of powers (as the liberal thinker Xiao Shu aptly noted, this separation "is the golden rule of modern political civilization: add to it and it becomes bloated; subtract from it and it becomes emaciated"), the finest common law tradition, and the most exemplary university autonomy framework—still holds the potential for continuous revival and the ascent to new historical peaks in the future. Yet, "those in the thick of things are often blind," just as the Chinese themselves were deeply entrenched in the anti-market dogmatism of planned economies during the 1960s and 1970s, finding it difficult to extricate themselves.

"What is America? What should America be? What caused America's past successes? Are America's current difficulties temporary or long-term? Are there elements within America's current 'social consensus' that require revision, transformation, or radical change? And what are the criteria for such change...?" Reagan's intellectual depth did not reach this level of theoretical reflection on the fundamental principles of the nation's founding philosophy or critical examination of historical experience. He merely made pragmatic adjustments and was conservative, but that alone was certainly insufficient.

His reputation exceeded his substance, carrying a certain degree of superficiality—this is my overall assessment of Reagan, and likewise of his conservatism. This judgment rests on Reagan's legacy—both positive and

negative—and whether he truly faced and shaped the challenges of a great crisis: Reagan never experienced or led a major war like Washington or Lincoln, nor did he stand at the nation's founding like Jefferson, with the opportunity to draft the Declaration of Independence and establish a fundamental political course for posterity. The absence of such a great crisis inevitably led to a lack of major trials and the insufficient cultivation of inner strength.

Regarding personal style, Lincoln's speeches sometimes failed to elicit immediate audience response yet achieved timeless resonance; Reagan's speeches, however, often felt overly ornate and populist, as if deliberately pausing at certain points to await applause. An excessive pursuit of immediate comprehension often hinders the creation of a lasting legacy.

Philosophical Reflections on Conservatism (Part V)

X. What Is the "Real Issue" in America Today? How Did Bush, Obama, and Trump Address It?

George W. Bush's 2000 election victory was bolstered by strong support from Protestant evangelicals, and his devout personal life as an adult resonated with his inner passion.

In peacetime, Bush assembled a war cabinet. Not after 9/11, but six months earlier, at the outset of his presidency, his cabinet was already a war cabinet: Tony, the Secretary of Defense during the 1991 Gulf War, became Vice President; Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, became Secretary of State; and the hawkish Rumsfeld became Secretary of Defense. Bush's first Treasury Secretary, O'Neill, complained after resigning that in two years of service, he had met with President Bush alone only three times—Bush was simply too indifferent to "internal priorities."

Bush's political focus was clearly external. The once-prominent neoconservative ideology largely shaped his governance approach, representing an aggressive international strategic philosophy. Neoconservative strategists were largely a group of pure theorists with no combat experience. Using the United States' resounding victory in the 1991 Gulf War as their grand narrative backdrop, they greatly exaggerated the "value" of America's final triumph in the Cold War. They envisioned securing a series of new military and political victories through "preemptive strikes" and "regime change," aiming to permanently cement America's dominant position as the sole superpower. The idealized image of America they aspire to forge is that of a benevolent empire spanning a millennium, surpassing even the Roman and British empires of history.

The post-9/11 war on terror seemed to offer politicians a historic opportunity to advance neoconservative agendas. Yet the architects of this agenda committed a strategic blunder by voluntarily relinquishing their "second echelon of military supremacy" (the U.S. fell out with France and Germany over a month-long buffer period needed to negotiate Saddam's

exile options). They also unnecessarily pushed Syria and Iran—countries that had extended overtures of goodwill—into the roles of covert adversaries or disruptors. Their early leadership style in the Iraq War evokes historical figures like Zhao Kuo and Ma Su from China's annals. Ma Su. After spending trillions of dollars on military expenditures, the U.S. remains unable to extricate itself from the "Iraq quagmire" and the "Afghanistan quagmire," with the "aftermath of imperial expansion (the U.S. expands power, not territory)" fully evident. Domestically, the 2008 financial crisis erupted, finally bursting the long-festering abscess of manufacturing hollowing out. The Bush era is widely recognized as the turning point in America's transition from peak to decline, with neoconservatism quickly becoming a pejorative term.

Objectively speaking, setting aside debates over "second-tier military hegemony," America's relative setbacks in the Iraq and Afghanistan counterterrorism wars severely damaged its international prestige but did little to diminish its global power—the real problems lie within.

The hollowing out of manufacturing and the persistent decline in actual comprehensive national strength represent America's most profound internal threats. The "imperial pact" and the "two-faced nation" certainly bear primary responsibility for this. Yet another independent and significant cause exists: the inherent radical nature of the American people.

As a new nation formed by European immigrants, for centuries, the people of the New World embraced new knowledge, technologies, and information from Europe—the center of civilization—with open arms and fervent enthusiasm. The vast expansion of the New World's economy, population, territory, lifestyle, and individual life experiences seemed to unfold along a triumphant, dreamlike trajectory. A profound thirst for novelty and change is, in essence, the American character. While this drive has unlocked immense opportunities and energy, it inevitably exacts a price in the form of insufficient weight, steadiness, and prudence.

During the environmental movement that surged in the 1950s, Americans went too far. While it was entirely necessary to ban industrial projects that directly endangered public health and safety, how many factories were forced to relocate or shut down simply to meet unverified standards for chemical substance levels whose direct harm to people

remained unproven? Numerous celebrity memoirs bear witness to this. The pursuit of novelty at the expense of tradition, and the extreme application of paper requirements—excessive environmentalism—stand as the direct culprits behind the hollowing out of American manufacturing.

American futurists in the early 1980s successfully foresaw the post-industrial society, the Third Wave, and the information industry revolution—truly admirable achievements. Unfortunately, their predictions almost universally implied a foundational assumption: that secondary industries would soon become obsolete, replaced by tertiary industries. A more natural and realistically viable logical alternative—reforming secondary industries through information technology to integrate them into new economic pillars—was widely and gravely overlooked. The American economics community later added an even more fatal foundational assumption: America's lagging secondary industries would gradually relocate to developing nations in accordance with the "laws of international division of labor," while the U.S. would primarily provide cutting-edge information products and services. This theory of international division of labor blatantly contradicted the principle of "proximity and convenience" (from which later theories of industrial chains and supply chains emerged, now accepted as a new global economic consensus). Yet it prevailed for decades, even earning a Nobel Prize in Economics for its proponents.

Of course, numerous other factors contributed to the hollowing out of American manufacturing—such as the financial sector's excessive expansion siphoning off manufacturing investment, the necessity of massive imports to maintain the dollar's global currency status, and excessively high social security burdens on enterprises, dampening economic expansion. Yet the dominant internal cause remains: nationwide blind faith in new industries and contempt for old ones created an environment highly unfavorable to manufacturing, the economic bedrock. The American nation is too young, vigorously pursuing novelty and viewing "favoritism for the new and aversion to the old" as natural. The problem is that new things do not arrive as swiftly as anticipated, while old things may possess inherent, enduring value that cannot be discarded.

Developed nations that followed America's pursuit of "more advanced," greener, and financially dominant positions—like Britain and France—have

now also fallen into the trap of manufacturing hollowing-out. Only Germany, Switzerland, Japan, and China have reaped the substantial benefits of maintaining robust manufacturing bases.

During the 1980s, the United States gave birth to the most innovative and dynamic cluster of management sciences in recent history—including systems theory, cybernetics, information theory, fuzzy mathematics, futurology, game theory, personality psychology, social psychology, and business administration. Yet today's American political theory circles seem to have largely discarded the core elements of this legacy. Ideologically driven political conservatism and religious conservatism are now prevalent, with dogmatism, obscurantism, and coercive neo-collectivism intensifying. These trends not only increasingly suppress critical rationality and free discourse but also erode America's traditional pragmatic and operational rationality. These irrational conservative currents, coupled with the nation's overly "novelty-seeking and old-rejecting" radical tendencies, compound Americans' difficulty in recognizing and reversing their current internal crisis.

The hollowing out of manufacturing and the "two hearts within one nation" represent the core of America's current internal crisis. This is neither an illusion nor a temporary setback, but a deep-seated social pathology accumulated over the long term, capable of pushing America toward decline and misfortune. It is the "real problem" America urgently needs to address. The 2008 financial crisis laid this "real problem" bare, yet President Obama, following Bush, did not commit to solving it. As a black man, Obama was beloved by all humanity. His personal image embodied American civilization's diversity and inclusivity, its youthful vitality, and stood as the latest embodiment of the American Dream that celebrates individual striving. Yet as president, Obama continued to advance the "one nation, two minds" status quo, seemingly oblivious to the true state of America's core foundation.

A seemingly narrow conservatism has confronted America's "real problem," taken steps to address it, and begun to show initial results. This is Trumpism.

Trump appears to have dimly recognized not only the tangible existence of America's "real problems," but also that the nation's foremost political task

today should be to concentrate primary resources on resolving these genuine issues. To this end, during his first three years in office, he unleashed a flurry of punches against numerous popular "politically correct" norms. In doing so, he trampled several red lines of human civilization through "mischievous pranks"—directly violating natural justice or natural law—in areas such as respecting racial equality, honoring women, upholding the Fourth Estate's role, and safeguarding procedural justice. His nationalist approaches to immigration and trade wars proved highly contentious. Yet he was correct in advocating "America First" over imperial priorities, implementing massive tax cuts to boost employment and support domestic manufacturing, and temporarily easing stringent environmental regulations. These actions were not merely operationally or pragmatically sound; they also aligned with the legitimate interests of the American people and the universal principles of natural justice or natural law at the level of value rationality.

Trump's political trajectory primarily represents a conservatism grounded in pragmatic rationality, not the value-based conservatism imposed upon him by those overreaching and unrestrained religious conservatives. Does Trump's ideology contain populist elements? Political theorists with historical depth have long observed that the Christian right's intermediary role has increasingly positioned the Republican Party as the political representative of America's grassroots. Trump's behavior bears a striking resemblance to the "people's leader" or demagogue of ancient Athens, with the emphasis not on the "people" of populism but on the "leader" of populism. Trump's pragmatic conservative tendencies cannot obscure his demagogue-like attempts to break free from institutional constraints through provocative maneuvers. To this end, he cunningly repurposes the "external enemy creation" game—a staple of American political culture—to "internal enemy creation." By provoking and intensifying domestic divisions and hatred, he steadily fortifies the loyalty of the grassroots populace. Here, Trump's campaign strategy reveals an unprecedented moral destructiveness in anti-establishment tactics. Within the robust framework of constitutional democracy, Trump lacks the objective capacity to become a dictator or tyrant. Yet his assault on the invisible restraints of political customary law and tradition, his violation of millennia-old political virtues universally recognized by humanity, might these actions severely undermine the moral

foundations of a free society? Nations valuing virtue see this far more clearly than those fixated on power and deceit.

Even considering the legitimate interests of the American people solely, Trump remains relatively radical. America may objectively require more pragmatic conservatism and operational conservatism than Trump embodies to counterbalance his excessive pursuit of novelty and change.

XI. What is the connection between Straussian conservative theory and contemporary American conservatism?

Since the rise of neoconservative thought in 2001, and even amid recent major controversies over immigration in American society, an academic narrative persists: the conservative wave in the United States over the past four decades appears profoundly influenced by the ideas of Leo Strauss, the renowned political philosopher of the 1950s and 1960s.

No substantive evidence or inherent connection sufficiently substantiates this claim. Strauss was an academic thinker, not a social thinker; he had no political or social doctrine, and his academic ideas did not receive sufficient social dissemination.

Nevertheless, many of Strauss's conservative ideas do possess a certain prescience.

Strauss stated: "The sect is narrow because it passionately engages with real issues. The Republic of Letters is broad because it is indifferent to real issues, preferring consensus over truth. If forced to choose between the sect and the Republic of Letters, we must choose the sect."The "Republic of Letters" refers to a boundless tolerance that emphasizes academic consensus over truth and genuine issues, disregarding morality and natural law—a mindset that seems to mirror certain current American trends of "political correctness" devoid of humanistic truth or natural law foundations. Strauss's positive affirmation of the "sect" that upholds truth seems to offer a theoretical defense in advance for efforts like Trump's to address America's "real problems." However, Strauss's "theory of sectarian legitimacy" is grounded in humanistic truth and natural law; it in no way endorses all anti-establishment efforts or seeks to cloak and disguise those wild, Nietzschean challenges to "political correctness."

Strauss states: "The political society has always been, and will remain for the foreseeable future, a particular society, a bounded society—that is, a

closed society concerned with its own improvement." In critiquing Popper's The Open Society and Its Enemies, Strauss demonstrates an alignment with Plato's original context that surpasses Popper's own. Strauss's positive affirmation of liberal democracies as "closed societies focused on self-improvement" has recently been invoked by certain scholars to morally justify anti-immigration actions in Western nations. From a Straussian perspective, the correct meaning of "open society" should refer to a pluralistic and inclusive society grounded in free thought, free speech, and critical reason—not one that indiscriminately shares political rights, employment opportunities, and social welfare with immigrant populations. The question remains: What precisely constitutes legitimate "closedness"? Where lies its reasonable "boundary"? When certain Chinese ultra-right conservatives regard Huntington's "WASP-dominated America" theory as inherently justified, how does it differ from distorted racism within the American context? Does it violate humanitarian truths and natural law?I believe that faced with this crucial moral dilemma, Strauss would never side with the "pseudo-existence" that opposes humanitarian truth and natural law.

Strauss declared: "The most urgent duty of the truly free man today is to combat with all his might that degenerate liberalism which proclaims that man's sole purpose is to live happily without restraint, while utterly forgetting that man must strive for noble character, excellence, and moral perfection." Strauss consistently upheld natural justice against the relativism, positivism, and historicism prevalent in the 20th century. By extension, certain extreme experiments in the American left's new lifestyle represent one manifestation of this rampant "corrupted liberalism." Yet Strauss's critique transcends mere moral admonition; it substantively delineates liberalism's boundaries: corrupted liberalism is pseudo-liberalism; only the pursuit of virtue and nobility constitutes liberalism aligned with natural justice. By this standard, does Trump—who disregards political virtue and consciously or unconsciously adopts a demagogue's style—qualify for inclusion in Strauss's community of virtuous and noble liberalism?

Strauss indeed possessed a unique and exceptional conservative thought, but he did not develop a systematic conservative theory. His core conservative inclination was to advocate overcoming the ills of modern liberalism and returning to the value sphere of classical political philosophy.

As the renowned scholar Gan Yang summarized, "The first step in returning to 'classical political philosophy' lies in viewing politics through the 'pre-scientific' lens of the classical political philosophers Plato and Aristotle—that is, through the eyes of citizens and statesmen—rather than through the so-called 'neutral observer's political science lens' of modern philosophy and social science. This classical philosophical approach to observing politics embodies the unity of knowledge and action. It represents the reflective engagement of sovereign citizens with their real-world destinies and the active presence of those responsible for civilizational values.

In terms of action, Strauss's conservative thought essentially concerns how to authentically revive classical political philosophy, enabling contemporary people to stand upon the pinnacle of all ages and climb upward. According to Strauss's original intent, this classical political philosophy encompasses not only Plato and Aristotle but also Confucius from the East. This represents conservatism of the highest order. Currently, every nation in the world remains very, very distant from this highest standard.

In the social sphere, modern political science primarily champions the "discourse of rights," whereas classical political philosophy advocates the discourse of "virtue and the noble life." Recent months of online debates in China surrounding the U.S. election sufficiently demonstrate that liberalism, which emphasizes the "discourse of rights," tends to degenerate into "corrupted liberalism" when confronted with intense competition among differing opinions. Straussian retro-conservative thought has proven relevant and truthful in the Chinese context. China's liberal civil society, which values reflection and open-mindedness, seems to require conserving both the modern "rights discourse" orientation and the classical, eternal "virtue and noble life" discourse orientation.

Philosophical Reflections on Conservatism (VI)

XII. Is conservatism a major branch of liberalism, or an independent academic school of thought? What is the true, independent significance of conservatism?

I once envisioned a conservatism rooted in "preserving the Way of Heaven or natural law," but upon reflection, I realized this ideal conservatism is actually unnatural.

For the Way of Heaven or natural law is abstract and universal, applicable across all times and spaces without particularity. It thus fails to embody the distinctive qualities that enable a specific community to exist and flourish effectively, to attain dignity, honor, freedom, and refinement. What conservatism seeks to preserve are precisely such particular qualities—the unique traditions, customs, or rules and orders of that community.

The Anglo-American conservative Puritan tradition, the Chinese conservative Confucian tradition, and similar forms of conservatism are all natural conservatism. This is because their objects are traditions with specific affiliations, internally developed, proven through the test of time to possess profound value, and deeply identified with by the people of the nation in which they exist.

Those seemingly abstract customs and practices actually constitute orders with specific operational forms or chains of behavior.For instance, when modern Britons advocate preserving "British liberty," they are in fact safeguarding the civil liberties upheld by the English common law tradition since Magna Carta—including personal rights, the right to trial by jury, property rights, parliamentary checks on executive power, freedom of speech, and commercial freedom. This preservation relies on the concrete functioning of Britain's unique legal system: one characterized by judicial specialization, socialization, and adjudication based on customary law.Thus, the call to preserve "English liberty" fundamentally pointed to a uniquely British order of "liberty under law."

Similarly, for over a century, Americans have repeatedly invoked the

tradition of "individual striving." This actually signifies the preservation of a lifestyle rooted in active individualism. In practical terms, it means that free individuals constantly pursue economic independence, viewing personal initiative, proactive endeavors, and the pursuit of dreams and miracles as honorable; When facing difficulties, individuals should first seek autonomous solutions. Even when outsiders or communities offer assistance, the primary aim is to help them regain self-reliance or revitalize themselves, minimizing the abuse of charity that might foster dependency or laziness. This conservatism preserves a social relationship model guided by proactive individualist values.

Do these two examples constitute tangible proof that "conservatism is the preservation of liberty"? No, they do not. For the primary, authentic, and fundamental pursuit of such conservatism remains the preservation of a rule-of-law order or social relationship model. Individual liberty is merely one element within the preserved group order.

Conservatism primarily seeks to preserve a particular group order and distinct traditions. In nations with traditions of partial limitation of power, upholding established laws or old customs often effectively prevents the emergence of authoritarian strongmen or tyrants. However, in societies characterized by rigid hereditary hierarchies or severe religious oppression, preserving established laws or old customs frequently signifies maintaining a servile authoritarian order or a theocratic rule that suppresses humanity and abolishes freedom. During Burke's era, British conservatism exhibited certain anti-liberal tendencies. The notion that "conservatism is the preservation of liberty" does not align with historical reality. Throughout human history, much of conservatism or conservative thought has been anti-liberal; healthy conservatism represents only a segment of this tradition. Logically, conservatism and liberalism are two overlapping circles: some liberalism is anti-conservative, and some conservatism is anti-liberal. Even the segment of conservatism that overlaps with liberalism is not a branch of liberalism. Positioning conservatism as "preserving liberty" does not elevate conservatism; it severely diminishes it, reducing conservatism to a servant of liberalism. Liberalism does not stand alone on an isolated peak; it has far from resolved the primary issues of human social life.

In my view, conservatism constitutes an independent academic school

of thought. Given that conservatism is one of the fundamental characteristics of human collective behavior, its emergence as a theoretical reflection on human conservative action was inevitable. Any society possessing a certain capacity for theoretical reflection will witness a conservative backlash following radical explorations driven by radical ideologies.

Liberalism prioritizes individual liberty above all else. So what, then, is the true and independent significance of conservatism?

The foremost defining characteristic of conservatism—its true essence—lies in its fervent advocacy that each of us should share destiny with our life communities: our families or mutual-support groups, our religious or cultural traditions, our ethnic groups or nations. It calls for cherishing the spiritual and material legacies passed down by our ancestors, safeguarding the crystallization of centuries of toil, sweat, and tears from generations past."A house built over a hundred years can be destroyed in half an hour of fury."A son sells his father's fields without a pang of sorrow." In stark contrast to such frenzied radicalism and callous ingratitude, conservatism genuinely seeks to honor the human journey—both our own and that of our predecessors. Every achievement that has withstood the test of time and conscience is the crystallization of our forebears' active, exploratory life journeys.

The Legalist philosophy of utilitarianism and historical nihilism holds that "upon death, all is emptiness; all is settled," advocating for unrestrained power-seeking and hedonism. Yet a worldview rooted in faith in eternal divine principles or a supreme eternal being holds that human existence possesses an absolute, indelible meaning. We dwell within an eternal spiritual realm, living under the "eternal judgment" (whether rendered by religious tribunals or the court of history); Individuals may receive blessings from their ancestors while living and leave behind enduring reputations—whether noble or infamous—upon their passing. More pure faiths hold that the sanctity of the human spirit is imperishable through the ages. Pursuing luminous, radiant, and sacred spiritual values that transcend all time and space represents one of the greatest opportunities and noblest contents of individual existence.

What conservatism strongly advocates and deeply implies is that we can coexist with the enduring, even eternal, spiritual values within our finest

traditions. The philosophical essence of conservatism is a form of co-existenceism—the belief that noble spiritual values transcend temporal boundaries. It seems inclined to propel us into the present, frozen upon a giant sampan laden with the spirits of our ancestors, to meet the boundless waves of the future. Upon this vessel, all noble and pure spiritual lives are immortal."I have joined a Puritan tradition akin to the Mayflower," I have joined the ancient Greek philosophical tradition," "I have continued the unbroken sacred lineage of Confucius and Mencius," "I live within Tang poetry"—these statements may all signify an authentic way for the individual spirit to find its ultimate refuge.

Some say conservatism can be broadly categorized into "moving backward" and "moving slower." Based on my analysis above, the core type of conservatism—the first type—should be "taking over." This is essentially joining the torrent of history and moving forward with the current. It may or may not be identical to what "moving backward" refers to. But the "moving backward" characterization is certainly inaccurate for the "revival of tradition" movement; the Renaissance is a prime example.

A major structural flaw in the concept of conservatism is that, like equality, it is not inherently value-rational but merely instrumental-rational. Conservatism even lacks the value-oriented quality of equality. Equality signifies the degree of sharing in noble spiritual values within a group relationship (as an instrumental rationality, equality naturally has serious structural flaws too). Conservatism, however, is a series of centripetal, light-seeking, protective behaviors that seem to exist only on the periphery of noble spiritual values. Yet the unique character of conservative behavior lies in its intrinsic cohesion to higher traditions, noble spirits, or even the eternal mother. It is a profoundly passionate act of returning to the source of life, a prudent wisdom that steadfastly guards existing achievements, minimizes risk, and thus conserves energy. Conservatism possesses more substantial content than ordinary instrumental rationality; it is an instrumental rationality intrinsically bonded with noble spiritual values. We might even regard the authentic practice of conservatism as a golden rope leading to supreme values, a core bond enabling the transmission of human civilization across generations.

However, conservatism often loses its value, or even degenerates, due

to the questionable nature of what it seeks to preserve. It frequently devolves into an obstinate force opposing freedom or change, driven by its own ignorance, irrationality, and collective coercion. How, then, can we overcome or mitigate these flaws to achieve a healthy conservatism?

Healthy conservatism requires natural preservation, beginning with a "proximity preference" for safeguarding the familiar, tangible, time-tested, and virtuous things that have endured through the ages. As American conservative economist Charles C. Sowell once observed: "Too many people, especially intellectuals, never appreciate what makes this country great until it is destroyed—often with their own help. By then, of course, it is too late." We can begin by seeking noble spiritual values within our own land and traditions that demand revival and restoration. This pursuit need not hinder our future boldness to challenge, explore, and attempt original breakthroughs.

Healthy conservatism requires rational preservation, demanding that specific traditions worthy of conservation undergo critical examination and moral elevation through the lens of modern humanitarian civilization and philosophical-scientific rationality. All things in the human world are concrete and imperfect, fraught with deficiencies and predicaments. Humanity's quest for truth is fundamentally a process of trial and error. Any specific theory or doctrine in secular society requires thorough empirical validation or logical falsification. Comprehensive information, free discourse, reasonable skepticism, and rigorous verification of causal relationships—these are fundamental, inviolable norms of public reason. The affirmation of outstanding values within tradition must proceed through the civilized procedures of public reason. Thought patterns that refuse to question causes, trample upon public rational norms, or even claim mystical obscurity as a privileged monopoly for deifying specific traditions—all under the pretext of historical achievements, group sentiment, or worship of the sacred—are irrational, uncivilized obscurantism. They inevitably lead to absurdity, chaos, fooling others only to deceive oneself, and invoking deities only to be abandoned by them.

Healthy conservatism requires employing a diverse, flat philosophical framework and pragmatic operational rationality to decisively resist dogmatism and totalitarian coercion. Dogmatism is the most terrifying

"pseudo-presence" within human civilization; the road to hell is often paved with fundamentalist stones. In a modern civilization or a nation aspiring toward modernity, attempts to establish a fundamentalist theocracy or cling to totalitarian confinement will inevitably breed immense conflict, division, and catastrophe. Truly healthy conservatives should courageously counterbalance and moderate the polarized mindset of "all or nothing" toward specific national or ethnic traditions. They should adopt an everyday, hybrid, and naturalized perspective toward traditions that are inherently diverse, flat, and fragmented. With a rational spirit characterized by moderation, approachability, steadiness, prudence, and gentle inclusiveness, they should engage in the scientific and rational separation, sublation, transformation, and elevation of different elements within tradition.

Who could have imagined that on the path of political transformation—learning, embracing, and practicing universal civilizational values—within a wall-jumping cyberspace free from coercive power and open to independent thought, various forms of political and religious fundamentalism would severely brainwash certain Chinese liberals? Who could have foreseen that after extreme leftist dogmatism had already wrought historic calamity, in 2020, an extreme right-wing dogmatism would begin attempting to march onto the Chinese stage? Contemporary history thus begins to reveal the profound depths and vast expanse of the world of ideas.

XIII. Have a minority of "religious conservatives" crossed two civilizational red lines in their discussions of the U.S. election?

In 2020, I was profoundly shaken by multiple unexpected revelations. One pertinent to this essay's theme was witnessing, through America's response to the BLM protests, the moral nobility of liberal democracy and contemporary Christian culture.

BLM favored direct action, unapologetically confronting inescapable racial discrimination in ways that made people "uncomfortable." The street protests sparked by the death of George Floyd were filled with bricks, stones, and "fire." Many like me, who favor civil protest, might wonder: Did they go too far? By early summer 2020, the order-loving Trump grew impatient, repeatedly urging the Department of Homeland Security to deploy forceful suppression. So the police arrived, the National Guard arrived, and the air grew tense. But then, the police and military suddenly knelt on one knee

before the protesting crowds. By using this signature gesture to oppose racial discrimination, they expressed solidarity with Black Americans. The nation soon followed suit: athletes and artists took a knee; politicians like Biden and Pelosi knelt; in North Carolina, "multiple white police officers and community members knelt on the ground to wash the feet of a Black pastor"; "New York City Police Commissioner Terence Monahan knelt and raised the hands of two protesters."In one location, "a group of police officers collectively knelt, pleading for the demonstrators' understanding. This bewildered the protesters, who then knelt alongside them, culminating in both sides embracing and weeping." Seeing these reports and images, I was shocked, deeply moved, deeply moved... This truly ranks among the most beautiful moments in human history.

People with tender hearts kneeling in this manner, of course, did so "for peace, unity, and healing." Yet at a deeper level, it also carried an expression of atonement by white people for the history of Black enslavement. This exemplifies the true greatness of the Christian spirit. On this particular theme, other non-Christian societies currently seem unable to achieve such a profound level of national or collective self-reflection, proactive atonement, and noble moral elevation. Witnessing this scene diminished my long-held concerns about "human nature's inherent evil" and filled me with confidence in humanity's future for enduring peace, compassion, and mutual aid.

The profound depth and breadth of Christian culture, along with its post-World War II refinement of moral character among Western populations, are universally acknowledged. We have witnessed that the ideal realm of moral justice envisioned by ancient Chinese philosophers can indeed be effectively realized in certain modern civilizations through the demonstration of free democratic systems and the autonomy of personal faith, religious practice, and social governance.

However, religion must not be politicized. The dark chapters of medieval theocracy and the religious oppression imposed by Catholicism and Protestantism during and after the Reformation—marked by stubborn tyranny and bloody disasters—are too horrific to revisit. The lessons from these periods deserve eternal remembrance by humanity.

Unexpectedly, amid the controversy surrounding the U.S. presidential

election, a segment of Chinese "religious conservatives" has passionately advocated for a theocratic system reminiscent of that which existed four centuries ago, displaying near-uncontrollable fervor that disregards or tramples upon fundamental principles like the separation of church and state—the very foundation of modern civilization. Their persistent obsession and regressive rhetoric have left many moderate, tolerant advocates of liberal democracy profoundly, profoundly shocked!

Some repeatedly demonize the American Black Lives Matter protests while coldly ignoring the rare moral breakthrough represented by the "Take a Knee" movement; Some shamelessly promote the "WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant)" paradigm—a preconceived premise of "white supremacy rationalism"—while advocating for the "legitimacy of freezing current racial demographics" in America, a nation built on dynamic immigration and multiculturalism; Some openly or covertly propagate arguments mocking, discriminating against, and rejecting people of color, even tacitly condoning insults against their own race...These individuals fundamentally fail to grasp that the humanitarian ideal of "all men are created equal," championed in the Declaration of Independence and its rejection of hereditary hierarchy, constitutes the foundational premise of American civilization. They utterly miss how American society evolved from a nation marred by slavery into today's globally recognized "melting pot."During this process, the free democratic system played an immensely powerful role in expanding moral horizons, while authentic Christian culture exerted crucial humanitarian effects in suppressing evil, encouraging virtue, and purifying and elevating society. Their so-called conservative liberalism remains, at its core, hierarchical liberalism.

Some scholars have crossed the civilizational red line separating religion from politics—dramatically exaggerating a normal electoral contest between two presidential candidates, each chosen by decent, well-meaning Americans, into a "battle between good and evil" or a "clash between virtuous and decadent civilizations." They thus maliciously distort a gentlemanly contest rooted in institutional civility and national consensus into divisive, adversarial conflict. They declare America's left-right cultural clashes to be a "spiritual war," ignoring that such battles belong solely within the church. They assert that the outcome of the 2020 U.S. presidential

election concerns "America's soul." Here, their underlying premise is a thoroughly collectivist concept of a "national soul," reflecting a medieval authoritarian ideology opposed to individual sovereignty and personal liberty. In their unrestrained, idolatrous support for Trump, many born before 1970 (!!!) unconsciously adopted the rhythm of "one party (the Republican Party, with the other party representing decadent civilization and thus the antagonist), one ideology ('religious conservatism'), one leader (Trump)"—is this not the rhythm of the extreme right?

Some scholars have crossed the civilizational red line separating religion from science—in their overreach to seize moral and truth high ground, they claim secular liberal democracies are and must be founded on Christian morality. This not only falsifies and distorts human history (democratic republics originated in ancient polytheistic Greece and Rome; the "God" in America's Declaration of Independence aligns closer with deism or rational religion, wherethe invocation of "God" primarily expressed reverence for the supreme being, eternal cosmic order, and natural law, while also honoring the nation's spiritual and cultural heritage—completely unrelated to religious interference in secular politics). Moreover, they absurdly deny the moral legitimacy of nations or societies adhering to other religions and cultural traditions to establish constitutional democracy. The fundamental political consideration of constitutional democracy, to guard against "human depravity," is, they arbitrarily declare, derived from the biblical concept of "original sin." Yet within pure political science, this was the core assertion made by Plato and Aristotle when they first championed the principle of "rule by law rather than rule by man." Subsequent Western political and legal systems primarily evolved from this operational philosophy of the two thinkers; Natural law, as the supreme principle governing human society, has also been subjected to sophistry by these scholars, who assert that "the concept of natural law originates from Christianity." Consequently, they claim only Christians can legitimately discuss its application. Yet historical evidence reveals that natural law philosophy first emerged in ancient Greek philosophy. Anaximenes and Heraclitus had already proposed the concept of unwritten or intangible natural law. The tragic playwright Sophocles made a classic statement on it in his play Antigone, while Plato and Aristotle restated and expanded upon

it. By the time of Cicero in Rome, natural law was exalted as the fundamental principle of the universe—a position that gained universal recognition and continuity in subsequent generations. All of this occurred before the birth of Christianity. No person of sound reason and conscience would ever believe that fabricating evidence on such a serious and significant scientific issue for the sake of "promoting Christianity" aligns with the Ten Commandments or ethical norms of orthodox religion.

We might call this a knockoff version of "religious conservatism," reflecting an impure religious conviction. Some invoke Christianity to discuss matters concerning the United States and China, yet their arguments are fundamentally unrelated to Christianity. The core issue is that Chinese individuals born before 1970—regardless of whether they exhibit greater personal integrity and self-discipline or narcissistic self-interest—generally adhere to a culture of unprincipled means and political maneuvering in public ethics and politics. Even after exposure to liberal democratic values, they struggle to overcome deeply ingrained moral relativism and historical nihilism. Some who study and profess Christianity do not "first stand on God's side" themselves, using great doctrines like "love thy neighbor as thyself, "faith, hope, and love, to discipline themselves and aid others, promoting goodwill and dissolving conflict when faced with objective disagreements and disputes. Instead, they first boast that "God is on my side," sanctifying themselves in the name of Christianity while infinitely stigmatizing differing opinions. Even within Christian communities, they take delight in amplifying, escalating, and manufacturing hostility, division, and hatred. Such Christians certainly do not appear as qualified true believers in the eyes of the world. Their uncontrolled behavior in the winter of 2020 has constituted a serious deviation from the great orthodoxy of Christianity.

Many assert that the development of a free Christian community could provide a certain boost to China's democratic cause. This is undeniably true, yet for Christianity, promoting democratization remains only a secondary function. Christianity's primary focus lies in the personal autonomy of a holy faith-based life, followed by social autonomy in the sense of moral civilization. Politics has its own domain, and religion has its own. Using religion to primarily promote democracy is fundamentally misguided. Applying a great spiritual tradition with two millennia of heritage to pursue

self-interest is not only sacrilegious but will also incur immense, unforeseen calamities.

By late 2020, China's homegrown version of "religious conservatism" had produced a political farce of a magnitude seen only once in centuries. This incident starkly reveals the profound distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Orthodoxy is rigorously defined by the Ten Commandments and higher principles of human reason and law. Its tradition has been painstakingly forged through centuries—or even longer—of unbroken doctrinal continuity. Developing the noble tradition of orthodox Christianity in China is a process that cannot be rushed.

XIV. How should we assess the destructive impact of academic dogmatism and knockoff "religious conservatism" on China's liberal enlightenment movement?

The destructive impact of knockoff "religious conservatism" cannot be underestimated. In fact, China's independent enlightenment movement has already suffered severe damage as a result.

The staggering prevalence of blind fanaticism, the unchecked spread of rumors without conscience or moral accountability, the dissemination of information implicating families and disrupting independent public opinion with "alleged" claims during the critical presidential election of a global democratic model nation—an act that constitutes a grave crime against democratic institutions—all without a shred of shame. Worse still, a tiny minority continues to clamor for martial law and military rule even after the electoral process has been formally concluded...The extent to which the egregious misconduct of a handful of active users on Twitter and WeChat has undermined the natural moral standing of China's civil society may take considerable time to fully assess.

Those with discernment feel both regret and anguish over this. Is this truly the outcome of China's long-standing grassroots enlightenment toward freedom and democracy? For the sake of a foreign election, a handful of so-called liberals have repeatedly crossed every rational, moral, and ethical boundary—even going so far as to redefine fundamental universal values like freedom, democracy, judicial independence, separation of church and state, and pluralistic tolerance. We all know who typically rewrite the dictionary of human civilization's common sense. Why have these liberals,

supposedly grounded in independent thought and character, become so utterly deluded and lost?

The core issue, of course, lies in people's failure to interpret raw information amid the fog.

This ability to interpret raw information is humanity's most fundamental survival skill. It follows the causal principles of truth-seeking activities and is supported by personal survival experience, social historical experience, and relevant recorded knowledge. The problem, however, lies in the modern social structure of professional specialization. The intellectual class, inherently lacking in management experience and practical knowledge of struggle, generally neglects the study of history and biographies. Some renowned Chinese humanities scholars have rarely, if ever, seriously studied the Twenty-Four Histories. Moreover, they have read very little of the classic works of Western philosophy, political science, and jurisprudence. Laziness and lack of ambition are widespread epidemics in the intellectual circles of Third World countries, and the Chinese have by no means been spared. Unfortunately, despite this severe lack of historical depth, foundational academic knowledge, and modern management expertise, these prominent scholars often take shortcuts. They preemptively embrace and vigorously promote grand concepts—so-called "isms"—to rapidly achieve academic recognition and social influence. Academic dogmatism typically emerges this way. Following the natural trajectory of authority's influence, the general public inevitably follows suit.

We have long recognized the pervasive and severe dogmatism within China's liberal intellectual circles. Yet none could have foreseen that when academic dogmatism collided with a knockoff version of "religious conservatism," the resulting chemical reaction would prove so devastatingly destructive.

Supporting or opposing Trump is a legitimate personal preference. Yet some unrestrained, near-fanatical Trump supporters have gone so far as to deny the very foundation of America's constitutional democracy—the reliability of judicial independence. If we retain basic survival instincts and common-sense rationality, we can assess this so-called 'complex, clouded' election dispute with minimal effort: America's judiciary is the most qualified and independent profession. Judges uphold the common law

tradition, with tens of thousands adjudicating cases independently, guided by conscience. It is impossible for them to collectively engage in political persecution against one of two presidential candidates in a normal election. The fact that 59 out of 60 cases filed by the Trump camp have been dismissed (with the latest record on January 3 showing 65 court hearings finding no evidence of election fraud) is the strongest proof: the Trump side has failed to uncover a single piece of solid evidence sufficient to warrant a case. One Chinese scholar casually asserted that "a case must first be filed before evidence can be examined." Yet according to legal procedure, a claim with such profound implications must first present irrefutable evidence—authentic and compelling documentary, physical, or video proof—rather than relying solely on individual testimony. Do these so-called liberal scholars and free-thinking individuals truly embrace liberal democracy with reason and conscience? Ask yourself: If you cannot trust the moral integrity of judicial independence demonstrated by America's most qualified and independent judiciary—which dismissed 59 out of 60 complaints—what faith do you have left in separation of powers or constitutional democracy? You are unconsciously marching to the beat of "one party, one ideology, one leader." For you, liberty and democracy may be nothing more than a passing fad. If you truly respect the conviction in freedom and democracy affirmed by your deepest, life-affirming conscience and reason, you will snap out of it immediately, touch your forehead, and realize the fever is breaking.

Some claim that doubting the "Biden curve" is common sense and rationality. But this refers to a method of counting mail-in ballots that occurred multiple times across states in the U.S. election—a one-off tallying approach that was dismissed in 59 courtrooms and, in fact, dared not be brought up. Let us examine what constitutes common sense and rationality. According to a prominent Chinese scholar, at a gathering on November 9th, "a couple among the guests belonged to different parties, yet they both accepted the results cheerfully. When election fraud was brought up, they dismissed it outright. You can't accept the congressional results from a ballot while rejecting the presidential results—that's absurd. It seems Chinese people still have a lot to learn!"This is true common sense and rationality—it's impossible to rig the presidential election on the same ballot without also rigging congressional elections (especially the Senate runoffs where

Democrats desperately sought control). As a mature model of democracy, the United States simply cannot be so corrupt or dysfunctional that it rigs hundreds of congressional elections in a presidential election year. Look at the hundreds of defeated congressional candidates—why haven't even a few of them stepped forward to loudly proclaim "election fraud"?

Xiao Guozhen, a former Beijing human rights lawyer now in the U.S., once translated a crucial judicial ruling, excerpted below:

On December 4, 2020, the Wisconsin Supreme Court rejected another attempt by Trump to overturn the election. Conservative Justice Hagedorn authored the ruling, explaining the unprecedented danger posed by the lawsuit's claims. Partial excerpt (link: https://electionlawblog.org/?p=119306), with translation and interpretation of selected sections. Personal interpretations are indicated in parentheses.

"...What is truly shocking is the ex post facto remedy sought by the plaintiffs. We are expected to declare the entire Wisconsin presidential election invalid—yes, they mean invalidate the entire state election—and we are told we should prohibit the Wisconsin Election Commission from certifying the election so that the legislature can re-select Wisconsin's presidential electors, then compel the governor to certify those electors.At the very least, no one can accuse these plaintiffs of being timid (implied meaning: these plaintiffs are incredibly audacious! — translator's interpretation).

Such a move is unprecedented in American history. One might expect such a grave request to be backed by substantial evidence; evidence revealing massive, provable irregularities in illegal voting—but there is none. Instead, nearly all the evidence relies almost exclusively on an expert report from an unsworn former campaign employee, based on statistical estimates from call-center and social-media surveys. This lawsuit falls far short of convincing evidence and legal justification. It fails even to establish this court's original jurisdiction (meaning the plaintiffs filed in the wrong court—translator's note). For instance, they fail to explain why their "challenge" to election procedures arose after the election rather than before it (What were they doing earlier? Claiming victory as a triumph of democracy when they won, then blaming election procedures when they

lost? No way! —Translator's note).

Therefore, we dismiss the initial complaint. Nevertheless, I feel compelled to share further reflections. The facts underlying this case raise issues far more fundamental than Wisconsin's electoral votes. In a sense, our faith in a free and fair electoral system stands as a core hallmark of our enduring constitutional republic. A case so demonstrably devoid of factual and legal merit could easily be dismissed to make way for the next one. Yet this case serves as a stark warning. The plaintiffs' pursuit of judicial relief represents one of the most dramatic exercises of judicial power I have ever witnessed. To judicially acquiesce to such a claim built upon such fragile foundations would permanently damage future elections. Once the door is opened to judicially overturning presidential election results, it will be difficult to close again. The path the plaintiffs ask us to take is a dangerous one. The loss would be immeasurable if exercising such judicial power led the public to lose faith in our constitutional order.

To declare an election invalid requires evidence and arguments commensurate with the scale of the relief sought. Yet the plaintiffs have strayed far from the case at hand. This litigation may be viewed through the prism of the bumpy, tumultuous landscape of electoral politics—but not for us. In this hallowed chamber, the law alone is king.

Through this judicial ruling, readers should gain a clear understanding of the American judiciary's true judgment—including that of the six conservative justices of the U.S. Supreme Court—regarding the election lawsuits filed by the Trump camp. Those "pro-Trump" individuals willing to appeal to their deepest conscience and reason may wish to reassess whether the moral dignity of America's judicial independence, as demonstrated in this manner, warrants respect from a true Chinese advocate of freedom and democracy.

The renowned thinker Hu Ping put it sharply: "The crux of the matter is that many of our friends, who consider themselves the most ardent lovers of democracy, actually have no confidence in democracy at all. That is why they lack even basic judgment when faced with some obviously absurd information. In fact, they are only one step away from being anti-democratic. Some among them now even believe that the United States is unworthy of

democracy and cannot have democracy, that the United States must impose martial law and leader autocracy. If America is unworthy of democracy, then China certainly is."

A prominent scholar who once shouted, "These beasts! They should all be hanged!" has had a change of heart, and his Twitter feed has gone silent. His basic rationality should tell him that marching in lockstep to the rhythm of "one party, one ideology, one leader" within a closed circle of echo chambers and irrational frenzy will push him into a state of madness where he loses his conscience and his true self. Once the marching stops, independent thought can begin to return.

Yet several seemingly possessed liberal scholars persist in fueling the "suspected" existence of vague accusations of U.S. election fraud—a phenomenon severely undermining the moral authority of the separation of powers. While China's official poverty alleviation efforts have long grappled with "relapse into poverty," it is deeply lamentable that in the winter of 2020, we witnessed the bizarre spectacle of a "relapse into ignorance" emerging within China's liberal circles!

Much like China's persistent failure to achieve significant breakthroughs in original technological innovation, even the most progressive liberal circles on the mainland—long subjected to mass indoctrination and one-sided information suppression—suffer from severely constrained individual independence and critical thinking due to fundamentally weak foundations and hollowed-out intellectual grounding. When Trump—a "charismatic leader" or demagogue whose experience, eloquence, and demeanor are hardly exceptional, and who bears grave responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of his own citizens during the pandemic—stirs the waters, America's right wing may merely be mildly infatuated, while China's grassroots right wing may already be deeply enamored.

To my knowledge, the vast majority of those captivated are fundamentally kind-hearted individuals who retain a sense of justice regarding domestic affairs. Among them are many courageous practitioners of freedom. Some friends also note that the post-1970 generation is generally more moderate and level-headed than their predecessors. Many maintain a cautious, neutral stance of observation and reflection, resisting the pull of

collective irrational fervor. They effectively constitute China's "silent majority."I hope this information is accurate, though it remains to be gradually confirmed in the future.

Reflecting now, the thriving Chinese democracy and rights movement of the past 18 years also committed a structural blunder. We once envisioned "enlightenment through action." In reality, as wave after wave of freedom advocates crossed the river from knowledge to action, fighting valiantly, and millions cheered them on from the other side, it cannot be said that "enlightenment through action" achieved no results. But now, the problem lies with the activists and enlighteners themselves. Amidst a foreign fog, the independent character and critical thinking of this enlightener-activist group have collapsed on a massive scale, resulting in a political farce of a kind seen only once in centuries. This ugly reality directly demonstrates that without a commitment to deep learning and self-cultivation in foundational modern civilizational competencies—such as empirical reason, operational rationality, critical thinking, overcoming superstition and ignorance, breaking free from authoritarian dependency, rejecting manipulative tactics, mastering rules and ethics, embracing prudence and the middle path, and fostering diversity and inclusivity—China's civil society and the nation as a whole cannot progress far on the flimsy foundation of "enlightenment through action" alone. Without establishing a solid foundation, what rises will always be nothing but bubbles.

Beijing's Democratic Duo—Zhao Changqing and Ding Jiaxi

On April 17, 2013, Beijing's Democratic Duo—Zhao Changqing and Ding Jiaxi—were raided and arrested by the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau on charges of "illegal assembly." This action was a pure fabrication, and the world at large condemns it.

Reading the Three Kingdoms, we appreciate beauty and recognize ugliness. From one perspective, we must acknowledge that the central intelligence apparatus demonstrated remarkable foresight in targeting Beijing's two most qualified and action-oriented democratic elites for political persecution. Yet, as has happened before, is this not also foolishly helping the freedom and democracy camp cultivate new superstars?

Since the June Fourth incident of 1989, over the past twenty-four years, the moral pillars and strategic talents needed to meet the historical challenge of political transformation have long been forged within overlapping prisons, in the depths of the earth, and beneath the waters of real combat. They are now poised to emerge one after another, with the extreme leftist currents inevitably sounding the gong to clear their path.

Zhao Changqing, democracy movement activist and one of the five or six principal drafters of Charter 08. A key leader of the 1989 student movement, he served as Secretary-General of the Liaison Department of the All-Campus Student Union. Originally from Shanyang County, Shangluo City, Shaanxi Province, he graduated from the History Department of Shaanxi Normal University. This democratic elite, tempered by decades in the crucible of totalitarianism, has in recent years become one of the primary coordinators for dinners, exchanges, and academic activities within Beijing's civic circles. His personal integrity, open-mindedness, literary talent, and organizational skills are all first-rate, making him a true polymath. Over the past 24 years, he has been imprisoned three times for his democratic activism, serving a total of eight and a half years. Yet he has grown increasingly moderate and benevolent, steadfastly advocating for political reform and orderly transition. His humanitarian spirit, consistent with the ideals of freedom and democracy, is deeply admirable.

Ding Jiaxi, a native of Yichang, Hubei, has emerged as an outstanding rights defense lawyer in recent years. Graduating from Beihang University with a degree in aircraft manufacturing, he pivoted to become a commercial lawyer specializing in intellectual property protection—a remarkable career shift. His roles as Secretary-General of the Beihang Entrepreneurs Association and President of the Golf Association confirm his status as a member of the middle-class elite favored by transformative political studies. Yet he has successfully forged a strategic alliance between the middle class and grassroots petitioners—a marvel within a marvel! Since Ding Jiaxi and Xu Zhiyong joined forces, the New Citizens Movement has gained significant momentum. If Xu Zhiyong is the movement's intellectual leader and spiritual guide, Ding Jiaxi serves as its operational heart—an exceptional organizer.

Zhao Changqing and Ding Jiaxi share a common trait: they eschew traditional strategies of biding their time and lying low, instead acting on their convictions and openly advancing social movements. Their transparency and straightforwardness embody the genuine moral responsibility required of a democratic movement. Beijing's civic society evolved from dinner gatherings and salons to a stage of boldly exercising citizens' political rights. In this transition, the efforts of active citizens like Xu Zhiyong, Hu Shigen, Hu Jia, Jiang Tianyong—Zhao Changqing, Ding Jiaxi—Li Wei, Wang Yonghong, Sun Hanhui, Yuan Dong, Zhang Baocheng, Hou Xin, and Ma Xinli were indispensable. The first street theme launched by the New Citizens Movement was "Citizens Demand Officials Disclose Their Assets!" Over the past few months, this call has resonated strongly nationwide, gaining near-unstoppable momentum. The Beijing Public Security Bureau's criminal detention of the "Nine Gentlemen" for demanding asset disclosure proves this street slogan has struck a nerve with China's ruling elite. The New Citizens Movement has effectively conducted strategic reconnaissance for China's civil society, while the secret police apparatus has unwittingly exposed the underbelly of totalitarian rule. Future pluralistic political forces on the mainland will draw profound lessons from this. As integral links in Beijing's civic society, Zhao Changqing and Ding Jiaxi demonstrated rare courage, insight, and execution. The secret police's arrests and political persecution have, in turn, elevated them into strategic

moral pillars for the public. The unfolding developments hold considerable significance.

Though I have met Zhao Changqing and Ding Jiaxi only a few times, they left a profound impression on me.

In late July 2012, I met Zhao Changqing in Beijing. His organizational prowess displayed at gatherings of dozens, his magnanimity, cheerfulness, composure, gentleness, and sincerity left an indelible impression on me. Later, I learned he was a devout Christian, baptized in prison, who had grown in piety and holiness through adversity. His moderate political views were underpinned not only by liberal ideals but also by profound religious conviction.

Ding Jiaxi, my fellow Hubei native, and I met several times in Beijing and Guangzhou. Democracy activists and lawyers on Guangzhou's streets spoke highly of his operational philosophy. He was composed and approachable, possessing a subtle yet powerful charm that effortlessly deflected challenges while radiating an inclusive spirit. The spirit of freedom, justice, and love he and Xu Zhiyong championed, along with their call for a bloodless democratic transition, bore witness to the compassion and breadth of human nature.

Given Zhao Changqing and Ding Jiaxi's pivotal structural roles within Beijing's civic society, the intelligence apparatus likely calculated that detaining them would sever the bridge connecting the theoretical and action-oriented segments of Beijing's freedom movement, thereby forcefully suppressing grassroots street activism. However, judging by the wave of street protests demanding officials disclose their assets that erupted across Beijing and the nation over the following half-month, civil society has long since forged a diverse, flat structure. The secret police system's objective has not been achieved—nor could it ever be.

Yet astute analysts will discern a deeper strategic intent behind the security apparatus's actions: to strike at the momentum of official-civilian collaboration for change and sever the chain of reconciliation between the two. Since the 18th Party Congress, we have repeatedly observed the security apparatus's particular emphasis on conveying to civil society that Xi Jinping and Hu Jintao are indistinguishable. The more moderate, rule-of-law-oriented, politically reform-supporting, and government-civilian interaction-

encouraging a civil force is, the harder the secret service system cracks down on it. This approach is particularly dangerous and highly suspicious, and it should have long since aroused people's vigilance!

Through their writings and actions, Zhao Changqing and Ding Jiaxi have demonstrated that they are moderate democratic activists and constructive civil forces offering principled and resolute support to reformers. Xi Jinping, the new leader of the Chinese Communist Party, possesses procedural continuity within the party-state system but lacks legitimacy under popular sovereignty. His core political foundation consists of right-leaning forces within the CCP system, including Peng Dehuai, Hu Yaobang, Xi Zhongxun, Zhao Ziyang, Zhu Rongji, and Wen Jiabao. The vast right-wing forces outside the system serve as strategic allies to these internal rightists. Balancing left and right is a fundamental political strategy, yet the entire society's right-wing factions form the foundation of Xi Jinping's social base. The secret police system's crackdown on grassroots right-wingers—targeting independent, moderate reformers like Zhao Changqing and Ding Jiaxi who explicitly support reformists and political transformation—effectively erodes Xi's social base, imposing mental shackles and social confinement on potential reformers. Throughout history, mediocrities have been confined by their own cages. Can they break free? This test not only Xi Jinping's governance capabilities but also his capacity for self-preservation.

The arrests of Zhao Changqing, Ding Jiaxi, and the other Beijing Nine Gentlemen have sparked a strong moral backlash in public opinion. Yet the situation is no longer ambiguous. Multiple recent signals indicate that the momentum for change already underway cannot be reversed.

At this juncture, the public should avoid misjudging the situation or exaggerating dangers—fearing another Jasmine Revolution-style crackdown—which could lead to panic and retreat from actively exercising civic rights through social movements. The rational choice is to confront adversity while steadfastly pursuing moderate action.

To the intelligence apparatus, I solemnly advise: maintain composure, extinguish savagery, avoid trapping yourselves in a dead end, cease delighting in chaos, creating enemies, and demonizing the people. Continuing the easing process since the Wang Lijun incident is wise. Opportunities for proactive reconciliation remain abundant. Do not

transform ideological conflict into a jungle struggle for survival.

May 4, 2013

The Dalai Lama's Middle Way Approach Carries Profound Meaning

According to a Radio Free Asia reporter, during a recent teaching session for Taiwanese followers, the renowned Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, stated he would be willing to visit mainland China in his capacity as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. He emphasized his opposition to Tibetan independence, expressing a "preference for the concept of 'republic' as embodied by the People's Republic of China."

The Dalai Lama is an exceptional strategist who understands how to seize the moment when the Chinese Communist Party faces its greatest diplomatic predicament, timely proposing moderate negotiation demands. His suggestions are not only skillful but also remarkably restrained, avoiding any perception of opportunistic exploitation.

As an exceptional religious leader, the Dalai Lama's middle way philosophy embodies inherent flexibility, goodwill, and profound compassion. His words bear witness to his deep affection for the Chinese land and his intimate familiarity with the great Buddhist tradition. Indeed, China is not only the torchbearer of this magnificent tradition but has also become the world's largest Buddhist cultural nation.

Throughout the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, our ancestors achieved remarkable tolerance, allowing multiple religions to coexist peacefully within a single nation. Our ancestors never experienced "religious wars"; peaceful religious pluralism has been woven into our very blood. As we advance toward universal values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law today and tomorrow, this grand framework of religious diversity should be an inherent part of the spiritual lives of China's billions. This is precisely the essence of the "republican" philosophy the Dalai Lama expounds in his teachings.

China cannot be separated from the enduring nourishment of its great Buddhist culture. Over the past 1,800 years, the Chinese people have learned immensely from the vast expanse of Buddhist culture. In contemporary

times, we must also acknowledge that, having undergone initial reforms, Tibetan Buddhism inherits the rich and profound truths of Buddhism and propagates many essential Buddhist teachings worthy of deep study and reference by Han Chinese Buddhism. The devout adherence of the diverse peoples of Tibet, Qinghai, and Inner Mongolia to Tibetan Buddhism—a tradition rooted in peace and compassion—along with the kindness, tranquility, and nobility of its adherents, is evident to the world. Even in the measured restraint displayed by Inner Mongolians during last month's protests defending their ethnic language and culture, we can discern the subtle influence of Tibetan Buddhism's teachings of peace and compassion.

Buddhism is a great religion dedicated to fostering mutual love and respect among all humanity, and it is a noble spiritual faith that greatly benefits the diverse ethnic groups of the Republic of China. Tibetan Buddhism should be allowed greater and fuller freedom to spread throughout China, and the eminent religious leader, the Dalai Lama, should be revered as the spiritual leader of China's hundreds of millions of people.

The time has come to allow the Dalai Lama to return to his homeland to propagate the Dharma.

October 8, 2020

Appendix: The Dalai Lama Emphasizes Opposition to Tibetan Independence, Hopes to Visit as Nobel Laureate

Radio Free Asia Correspondent Xia Xiaohua, Taipei Report

The Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, delivered three consecutive days of teachings to Taiwanese followers via video link. He expressed willingness to visit mainland China in his capacity as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. He emphasized his opposition to Tibetan independence, stating he "prefers the concept of 'republic' as embodied by the People's Republic of China."

Having lived in exile in India for over 60 years since the Chinese People's Liberation Army entered Tibet, the Dalai Lama has consistently

sought peace talks with Beijing. During his teachings to Taiwanese followers on the 2nd, he floated a novel idea for visiting mainland China.

The Dalai Lama stated: "Recently I had a new idea. There are many Nobel Peace Prize laureates, right? If a meeting of these laureates could be held within China—since I have received the Nobel Peace Prize, I count as one of them—I could use this opportunity to visit mainland China."

Before mentioning the China visit, the Dalai Lama noted that a professor from Tsinghua University in Beijing had told him that once the situation changes, he would be invited to give a lecture at Tsinghua. The invitation would not be in his religious capacity, but rather in his academic capacity as a "professor," and he has already accepted.

Does Not Support Tibetan Independence, Prefers China's "Republican" Ideology

The Dalai Lama emphasized that his long-held "Middle Way Approach" does not seek independence, and he expressed affinity for the concept of "republic."

Dalai Lama: "I do not seek Tibetan independence. Although some Tibetans criticize this approach, I prefer the concept of 'republic' as embodied by the People's Republic of China. Under a republican framework, ethnic minorities like Tibetans, Mongols, Manchus, and Uyghurs can coexist harmoniously. There's no need to get bogged down in unnecessary disputes."

Encouraging Taiwanese to Visit Mainland China to Promote Buddhism and Chinese Culture

The Dalai Lama noted that mainland China has approximately 400 million Buddhists, a number that continues to grow. During his 1954 visits to Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, and Northeast China, he observed numerous Buddhist monasteries. Historically speaking, China has undeniably been a Buddhist nation—this is evident!

The Dalai Lama encouraged Taiwanese to influence mainland Chinese from a cultural development perspective: "You should proactively reach out to mainland China. The primary purpose of this engagement should not be solely economic development, because the complete Chinese culture is still preserved in Taiwan. However, the complete Chinese culture in mainland China has been damaged and fragmented due to the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, with cultural development as your goal, you should proactively

engage with mainland China. Buddhist scriptures are also part of this cultural development objective."

The Dalai Lama further stated, "Personally, I appreciate socialist thinking. For socialism to be practiced, it requires altruism—a heart of compassion and a mindset of caring for others. If one remains self-centered, no amount of rhetoric about socialism can achieve genuine socialism."

Although the Dalai Lama was teaching Buddhism to Taiwanese followers, he expressed greater hope that these followers, as successors to the Nalanda Buddhist lineage in India, would widely disseminate the spirit of Buddhism throughout mainland China. The Dalai Lama stated, "Through such exchanges, we can plant a seed. This seed can help the world's most populous nation propagate the truth-aligned concept of emptiness and the mindset of loving-kindness, thereby assisting this vast nation."

During the Q&A session, the Dalai Lama stated plainly that the Taiwanese organizers had provided him with five pre-translated questions well in advance, though this was unnecessary. Having memorized Buddhist scriptures since childhood and studied the Dharma diligently every day, he encouraged Taiwanese followers to ask him any questions directly via video link. He would answer what he knew and admit what he didn't. The Dalai Lama emphasized that even if he couldn't answer, there was no shame in it. He felt no need to pretend, as it was not a matter of saving face.

Originally scheduled for an hour and a half, the Dalai Lama's teaching session on the first day ran twenty minutes over as he addressed five questions. He concluded only after the host confirmed no further questions remained. Rising to depart, he turned back and waved warmly for a long time at the thousands of Taiwanese devotees watching on screen.

The Dalai Lama's visit was at the invitation of multiple Taiwanese Buddhist groups, including the Taiwan International Tibetan Buddhist Lineage Association. From October 2nd to October 4th, he delivered teachings via video link to Taiwanese devotees at the Taipei International Convention Center.

The pandemic could not stop the Dalai Lama's exchange with Taiwanese devotees.

This station understands that every October, Chinese Dharma groups traditionally travel to Dharamsala, India, to receive teachings from the Dalai

Lama. Unable to travel to India this year due to the pandemic, the Dalai Lama specially offered a three-day video conference course for Taiwanese followers. In accordance with the Taiwanese government pandemic prevention regulations, all attendees were required to wear masks and have their temperatures checked.

Tenzin Chuzom, a Taiwanese Buddhist practitioner with 25 years of experience who has traveled to Dharamsala, India, five times to attend the Dalai Lama's teachings, shared with Radio Free Asia: "Amid the pandemic, this is truly rare. With Taiwan's stable pandemic situation and the live streaming option, I'm incredibly excited—I'm still trembling with anticipation! I deeply hope the Dalai Lama can fulfill his wish to visit Taiwan next year to spread the Dharma."

Buddhist practitioner Bai Qiguang stated that despite the pandemic, this format fulfills the annual aspiration to receive teachings from His Holiness. Many Taiwanese friends who previously couldn't travel to India can now participate in this grand event together.

October 2, 2020

Source:
https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/shaoshuminzu/hx1-10022020091411.html

Reflections on the Three-Day Political Gathering at the Southern Media Group Headquarters

Abstract

The true agents of democratic struggle have shifted to the grassroots and middle-class citizens who form a cohesive civil society. Compared to university-based protest movements, civil society demonstrates greater resilience, rationality, strategic capability, and constructive power. Moreover, civil society possesses a far larger mobilizable population base than university-centered protest movements.

This generation bears the mission of establishing a free democratic system in China—a responsibility shared by both the private sector and officials who have embraced liberal values. Success need not be achieved by me personally, but I must be part of its achievement. Yet we must cherish every opportunity as we would our own bodies. The 23 years of endurance and the accumulated efforts of generations must not be squandered.

Political rights are the least passive of rights—they are the right to direct action, the right to form collectives, the right to assert sovereignty over oneself and the world, and the right to proactively secure all other rights. Advancing constitutional democracy and building civil society must begin with direct action and the exercise of these political rights.

The Significance of Southern Weekly Editors' and Reporters' Resistance

Over the past half year, Southern Weekly has repeatedly faced brutal interference from Provincial Party Propaganda Chief Tuo Zhen, enduring constant criticism and unbearable suffering. This latest intervention carries the nature of a desperate resistance. Within days, online discourse rapidly fermented, drawing in various sectors until the situation reached a fever pitch. Based on past experience, at critical moments, all it takes is for someone to step forward as a fulcrum of resistance to trigger an explosion. Thus, on the night of January 6, when employees of Southern Weekly's

economics department declared a work stoppage, the situation swiftly crossed the tipping point. That evening, tens of millions of users reposted the news on Sina Weibo, and this momentum naturally fueled the direct protests on the streets the following day.

As professionals within the system whose livelihoods face certain official constraints, it was no small feat for Southern Weekly staff to engage in direct resistance. This was a direct manifestation of their courage to defend independent integrity and freedom of speech—a rare "uprising of conscience" by the middle-class intellectual class.

The essence of the Southern Weekly incident is starkly clear: resistance against servitude, a fight for liberty. Some have downplayed the significance of this struggle, pointing out that Southern Weekly is a subsidiary of a party-affiliated newspaper and that its staff did not explicitly call for the abolition of press censorship during their protests. Yet constitutional freedoms have never been constructed through mere construction; they emerge through combination. The British aristocratic uprising gave birth to the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights. Conservative prudence serves as a constructive element in political revolutions, while collective actions demanding liberty act as rapid variables possessing immense shockwave impact. Though later political gatherings led to Southern Weekly staff being intimidated by the Central Propaganda Department's narrative of "hostile forces interfering," causing them to retreat slightly and fall silent, history will inevitably record their courageous stand at a pivotal moment to defend freedom of speech—an act that ignited the spirit of the times.

The Dominant Role and Class Analysis of Core Supporters in Political Assemblies

Just as a state of affairs requires a fulcrum to erupt, the political escalation and steadfastness at the protest site depended on the participation of core individuals and groups fighting for freedom.

The flower-laying solidarity event outside Southern Media's gates on the morning of January 7 was initiated spontaneously by Guangzhou netizens. This quickly escalated into a political assembly—directly propelled by Guangzhou's street-level democratic resistance forces. This was the actual unfolding on the ground, without exaggeration or embellishment. Street-level democratic resistance was not a minor stream or flank of the political

assembly, but its substantive core and mainstream.

On January 5th, 6th, and 7th, for three consecutive days, netizens, including Lao Shen, Ye Yin, Yuan Xiaohua, Liu Shanju, Yuan Fengchu, Yedu, Liu Yuandong, and the street democracy protest forces, held placards outside the Southern Media Group headquarters, escalating the direct street actions step by step. On the morning of the 7th, the placard directly displayed by Yuan Fengchu, Yedu, and Liu Yuandong—"Tou Po Must Go, or Guangdong Castrates Itself. Press Freedom, Constitutional Democracy"—set the political tone for the protest. Some netizens reported that it was precisely this placard that made the scene worth "surrounding and watching."Clearly, universal rights demands and idealistic values served as the true driving force mobilizing citizen participation. Precisely because this placard display ignited such intense momentum, Ye Du (who delivered a two-minute impromptu speech after holding his placard) and street democracy activist Yuan Fengchu faced brutal retaliation from state security: Ye Du was summoned by state security on suspicion of "illegal assembly" and subjected to the degrading humiliation of being stripped naked and searched by police officers at the local station. Yuan Fengchu was beaten to the ground by state security agents and auxiliary police who stormed into his temporary residence, while his roommate, Huang Bin, was slapped twice across the face by state security.

Key activists within the street democracy protest movement—Liu Yuandong, Xu Lin, Yuan Fengchu, Liu Sifang, Xiao Qingshan, Huang Bin, Zhang Maozhong, Xiaobiao, Li Zhengran, Ou Ronggui, Zhu Hanqiang, Zhuo Xie, Yu Gang, Shao Duo, Chai Jinyuan, and You Gui participated in the event, some fully engaged for days. They delivered direct, unfiltered political speeches, held banners, and conducted democracy advocacy. Their locations became primary gathering points for political assemblies, sites for the declaration of political themes, and driving forces of advancement. This was no coincidence but the natural overflow of accumulated energy among Guangzhou's street democracy activists. Over the past year and a half, this group—China's sole active street political protest team operating in Guangzhou's streets, parks, and squares—has weathered suppression only to grow more resolute. At the dawn of a new political era, they have stepped onto the national political stage. Objectively speaking, ordinary netizens

have not yet matured to the stage of directly spearheading political actions. Meanwhile, citizen groups with practical experience demonstrate far greater courage, resilience, and operational capacity than liberal intellectuals who remain confined to theoretical discourse.

From a demographic perspective, the core group of dozens of street democracy activists is primarily composed of a blend of working-class and middle-class backgrounds. For instance, prominent placard-wielders Lao Shen, Yedu, and Ye Yin are middle-class intellectuals; Liu Yuandong, a key speaker at political gatherings, is a biologist; and Xu Lin is an engineer and poet, both of whom are car owners. Yuan Fengchu, Xiao Qingshan, Huang Bin, Xiao Biao, and Li Zhengran are grassroots heroes who have emerged as standouts in recent street activism. Even more commendable is the direct participation of over a dozen lawyers and rights advocates, including Sui Muqing and Zhang Shu, at the front lines of the three-day political gatherings. They resolutely exercised their civic rights while naturally assuming appropriate legal roles to maintain order and prevent disruption or conflict.

Generally, both officials and citizens in Guangdong, a frontier of openness, often view social conflicts there as a preview of China's future. The model of grassroots and middle-class collaboration seen in the three-day political gathering may carry significant predictive and enduring implications. Over the past 23 years, civil society has risen and expanded through twists and turns and gradual accumulation. The 1980s model of collaboration between institutional forces and universities appears to have largely come to an end. Drawing parallels from South Korea's transition, university mobilization may be inevitable and carries a highly avant-garde, intense impact. In China, this youthful force has been partially supplanted by migrant populations in coastal regions and major cities, particularly the lower-tier migrant workers. Yet the true vanguard of democratic resistance has likely shifted to the citizenry—a convergence of grassroots and middle-class forces. Compared with university-based protest movements, civil society is more resilient, rational, capable of strategic maneuvering, and constructive. Moreover, in terms of the potential mobilization base, civil society far exceeds that of university-based protest movements.

Primary Demands of Political Assemblies, Citizen Self-Training, and Group Operational Models

Following the 1989 interruption, authentic street politics resumed in January 2013. The three-day political gatherings directly demanded political rights, actively exercised them, and overturned the constraints imposed by draconian laws.

In any protest movement, diverse societal participation and varied perspectives are natural and cannot be harmonized. This plurality of voices inevitably includes the most strident ones imaginable. These voices not only serve to agitate the masses and pressure the authorities but also embody the political exploration and emotional venting of those newly exercising their political rights. Thus, the three-day political gatherings were both a political struggle and a political experiment. Through direct action, these street democracy activists came to recognize the gap between imagination and reality. In practice, they had to consider the sentiments of "fair observers," prompting a shift in mindset—from unilateral advancement toward a more balanced pluralism.

Poet Xu Lin once put forward three moderate demands: calling for the resignation of Tuo Zhen; demanding the publication of the original New Year's editorial from Southern Weekly; and returning the Southern Weekly work Weibo account to the editors while unblocking all Weibo, QQ, and blog accounts suspended due to this incident. These three demands gained widespread support (I later added a fourth: the demand for the release of freedom of speech for all media and citizens nationwide). Witnessing Xu Lin—once the most radical and impassioned activist poet—become more rational, tolerant, open-minded, and mature after exercising her civic political rights and fully expressing herself among the masses, transforming into a constructive, active citizen and a broad-minded champion of democracy, has deeply moved me. The process of citizens participating in political activities is also one of learning democracy and self-training. True political currents are born in the crucible of real-world action. Through self-discipline honed in political protests like assemblies, marches, and demonstrations, genuinely qualified active citizens—and even future legislators, politicians, and social activists—can emerge and grow.

The overall atmosphere at the three-day political gathering was orderly,

rational, and moderate. Compared to past incidents in the Pearl River Delta, such as the Xintang and Zhongshan events, the order at the Southern Weekly site was commendable—protests remained confined to speech, without physical altercations. This moderate and orderly situation was maintained not only by the consistently temperate social environment in the south but also by the street activists' calm reflection and self-restraint, despite repeated provocations from ultra-left forces and the grassroots protesters' urge to escalate. The ultra-left contingent appeared regularly, and their actions were deliberate. They escalated their provocations daily, progressing from verbal attacks to physical confrontations. Initially taken aback, the street democracy protesters recognized their intentions and responded with tolerance, deference, and silence. By the third day, January 9th, as the area seemed poised for clearance, the far-left faction "moved with the moment." They proactively crossed over from the northern end of the gate—previously isolated by police—who tacitly allowed their passage. The leader of the far-left group forcibly seized a megaphone from a street protester and delivered a two-minute speech denouncing "traitors."The street protester politely inquired, "Are you finished?" The speaker froze, and the protester promptly retrieved his megaphone, defusing a potential physical confrontation. Several elderly democracy movement veterans formed a human wall, quietly blocking the ultra-leftists' provocative incursion.

Another crucial detail: Around 5:30 PM each day, police would urge people to disperse. Democracy advocates and street protesters would then signal to one another and voluntarily withdraw. In the absence of formal political organizations, participants reached multiple consensus points through discussions during meals. This gradually tempered the intensity of political speeches, fostering tangible political demands, respect for order, and appreciation for diversity and balance. While political organizations could certainly enhance on-site order and rationality through division of labor, making protests and political advocacy more effective, in the early stages of citizen street politics—before strong cohesion develops—spontaneous, flat, dinner-table coordination may better stimulate individual autonomy.

The Roles of Officials and Citizens Behind Political Assemblies

The greatest achievement of the three-day political gathering was the direct exercise of citizens' political rights, both in fulfilling and enjoying them. The authorities' tolerance carries immense potential significance, implying tacit recognition of the legitimacy of such civic political activities. This holds profound implications for both government and citizens, and for China's future as a whole. Although the State Security officers' insults and beatings of Ye Du and Yuan Fengchu clearly stemmed from deep hatred and a violent outburst fueled by extreme fear of the future (which is unacceptable), those handling the crisis from Beijing to Guangdong did indeed demonstrate a rare level of restraint. Aside from Zhang Shengyu, an active participant in street democracy protests who had not yet arrived at the scene and was administratively detained for seven days, no other political speakers or activists were arrested, and all house arrest measures were lifted by Monday (January 12). Overall, the situation has temporarily stabilized.

How should this situation be assessed? First, it must not be misinterpreted as evidence of formidable grassroots power forcing the authorities to retreat. Despite nationwide public outcry, during the five-day window of relaxed controls from January 5 to 9—a relatively neutral event with minimal perceived risk—only scattered individuals held signs in various provinces, with no widespread collective response. This demonstrates that while public opinion and underlying potential are vast, nationwide grassroots coordination and direct action capabilities remain extremely limited and should not be overestimated. The primary counterforce of civil society lies in moral influence, which can make suppression extremely costly. As participants themselves, the individuals involved were acutely aware: under the current political system, a three-day political gathering could not have occurred without official tolerance. Liu Yuandong, one of Guangzhou's theorists and leaders of the street democracy movement, stated in a speech that Mr. Hu Chunhua bears responsibility for protecting protesters exercising their civic rights. I later echoed this call via Sina Weibo: Regarding this democratic experiment in civil society, I urge Mr. Hu Chunhua to act as a protector of democratic rights—not as a destroyer. In this incident, not only did Guangzhou's grassroots political

gathering carry ice-breaking significance, but the authorities' tolerance also set a benchmark. Goodwill within the system is something to be cherished. On January 7, Meng Jianzhu announced plans to seek NPC approval to abolish re-education through labor within the year. When this news was later retracted from official channels, it paradoxically underscored the existence, pivotal position, and future potential of reformist forces within the system.

The democratic experiment of civil society requires rationality and foresight from both government and citizens. Official support is unnecessary; mere non-opposition, non-sabotage, and non-illegal suppression suffice. Practitioners are not armchair theorists. We must, with utmost goodwill, enhance the pervasiveness of constitutional democracy, unite the majority, secure operational space, advance societal roundtable discussions, and secure win-win outcomes. We inevitably welcome reformist forces within the government. Should future leaders like Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang in Beijing, or Hu Chunhua, Zhu Xiaodan, Wan Qingliang, and Chen Jianhua in Guangdong, genuinely advance political transformation, we will offer principled and steadfast support. All goodwill deserves a goodwill response; all trust merits a trust response.

However, as I have stated before, an independent civil society cannot pin its primary hopes for political transformation on reformers within the system. Instead, it must build a civic political society as the main foundation for advancing and securing political change. Therefore, we must primarily dedicate ourselves to the coupling, expansion, self-regulation, and capacity enhancement of civil society. This will enable the power of the people to counterbalance official power, fostering a historical paradigm where societal strength surpasses state power. Regardless of whether the authorities transform, the people will transform on their own and will continue to develop autonomously. I still wish to make a specific judgment that carries risk yet offers practical guidance: China's transformation has already begun, entering an era in which official and popular change proceed simultaneously. Pessimism is unfounded. Transformation is not like dining at a restaurant, where you order, the chef prepares the meal, and you simply enjoy it. Transformation is citizens themselves becoming the chefs, slowly savoring the process of stir-frying and cooking. Slow progress holds profound advantages. When the Southern Weekly incident first erupted, some

observers questioned whether the escalating waves of tension might recreate the turmoil of over two decades ago. My response was clear: this time, the process will be slow—and it will succeed. This generation bears the mission of establishing a free and democratic system in China, encompassing both grassroots activists and officials who have embraced freedom. Success need not include me personally, yet I am part of its success. But we must cherish every opportunity that comes our way as we would our own bodies. The 23 years of suffering and the accumulated efforts of generations will not be wasted.

The Future Path of Southern Civil Society After the Southern Weekly Struggle

China's civil society has entered a phase of advancing citizens' political rights following the transition to an authoritarian, limited-term system. Action shapes thought. Citizenship has two core dimensions: possessing political rights and exercising them. Without action, one is not a true citizen. True citizenship is active citizenship. In this era of freedom struggles, with enlightenment largely accomplished, action has become the paramount value.

Active citizens are not content with being pioneers; they aspire for all capable individuals to become pioneers as well. A generation's self-affirmation and sovereignty realization will be achieved through action. This is the cultural significance of action. Democratic systems cannot walk, but people can walk—they will walk democracy into existence. Since ancient times, resources for action have required development and combination. Fire must find dry wood.

The response of the nation's liberal forces during the Southern Weekly protest incident has indeed disappointed us. On the evening following the first day's political gathering, participants concluded that if provinces failed to respond within the next two days, the matter would end there. Frankly, the near-crocodile-like immobility of Beijing's intellectual circles has shocked me. I must partially revise my consistent affirmation of enlightenment and the middle class, reassessing the significance of the activist ethos brought by the rights defense movement. The rights defense movement once broke through the intellectual class's tendency to excel in discourse but falter in action. Through a series of social movements, it facilitated the historic

formation of opposition forces. The "new black five categories" summarized by the Political and Legal Affairs Committee best encapsulate this opposition force, and the rights defense movement deserves significant credit for this. Today, as civil society escalates its efforts, the rights defense movement must once again shoulder the mission of being pioneers, trailblazers, and sacrificial figures.

The fundamental inertia of the middle class and intellectuals will not be overcome by the rising tide of Weibo and Twitter. What is the next step?

On a broader scale, civil society can advance a model of grassroots-middle-class collaboration spearheaded by rights defense and street activism. Beyond continuing to unite and rely on rights defense lawyers, democratic pioneers, pro-democracy activists, free thinkers, and online opinion leaders, the rights defense sector will increasingly connect with the grassroots, engaging, interacting, and integrating with emerging forces in civil society. The new generation faces fewer constraints, embodying a natural sense of citizenship. The democratic protest forces on Guangzhou's streets represent the shining vanguard of this new generation. They, along with the hundreds of millions of emerging forces they symbolize, will form the mainstay of future democratic constitutional movements. Their counterparts are active in Shifang, Qidong, and Ningbo, and we will continue to witness their rise in the days ahead.

In this political gathering, the democratic protest forces on Guangzhou's streets spontaneously assumed a leading role, setting a crucial example for Chinese society: citizens should overcome fear through direct action, boldly assert their political rights, and resolutely exercise them. Yet, civil society deeply understands the intrinsic connection between economic rights and political rights. It will not rush to highly politicize all grassroots resistance, but instead will promote various neutral, socially beneficial grassroots economic and environmental rights protection efforts. By providing concrete assistance to the lower and middle classes and earning their fundamental trust, it will establish diverse, constructive, limited, and clearly targeted resistance alliances and support models. This will further mobilize more individuals to participate in civic political activities. The fear within civil society, cultivated under prolonged high-pressure governance, has not yet dissipated. One must not misjudge grassroots capacity solely on the basis of

bold rhetoric on Weibo and Twitter. While public sentiment is passionate and resolute, the people's strength still needs to accumulate.

The era and political landscape have undergone significant, quiet transformations. China's constitutional democratic transition may embark on an unprecedented path. The democratic experiment in the South represents one viable option among many. Civil society actors, through direct action—unadulterated, not all-in, orderly, and controllable—prioritize practice before procedural rule of law. This reflects prudent, far-reaching deliberation. This path must be taken eventually. While the economic climate remains favorable, with fewer official misreadings and hostilities, civil society should boldly advance. All possibilities exist—even a replay of Seoul's 1987 protests on the mainland would likely emerge from coordinated efforts in Beijing and Guangzhou. Given China's vastness, greater diversity is preferable. The future emergence of Shanghai, Wuhan, Xi'an, or Chengdu as political centers would each carry significance for balanced pluralism, shaping the political landscape of an electoral era.

When advancing civil society concretely, a sense of political realism is indispensable. Facing various constraints, the fundamental strategy is to break through first, then balance. Since immediate balancing is necessary, breakthrough goals should not be overly ambitious. Thus, actors must accurately assess variables, prioritize objectives, and target areas with the greatest potential for future resource development and least resistance. A peaceful approach, grounded in political realism, leads to mutual benefit. When encountering strong pressure, defense and counterattack become most advantageous.

Citizen political rights are the least passive rights—rights to direct action, to form collectives, to assert personal and global sovereignty, and to proactively secure all other rights. Advancing constitutional democracy and building civil society must begin with direct action and the exercise of these political rights.

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The fundamental path to self-rescue lies in political awakening

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Tonight the righteous man has passed away; tonight the mourners cannot sleep!

Tonight, Dr. Li Wenliang, one of the eight whistleblowers of the Wuhan epidemic, has tragically passed away. Having personally witnessed the outbreak through his clinical practice, he acted on conscience and duty, alerting his colleagues first. Yet he was summoned and reprimanded by the police. His body had already been silently invaded by the novel coronavirus. Despite isolation and emergency treatment, he ultimately succumbed to the disease. But until his death, he never received a single word of apology from the police. The tragic news has plunged the nation into mourning, with waves of grief and anger surging across the internet.

This undoubtedly adds a profoundly tragic chapter to the unprecedented national crisis of the COVID-19 outbreak's ferocious spread. This calamity

in a time of peace, this national disaster born of information suppression, erupted suddenly in China—a nation growing in peace—like a fairy tale or fable. The scale of the disaster and the staggering loss of life are heartbreaking. The explosion of online information within just fifteen days reveals that hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens are awakening in terror and anguish, forcing a sudden reckoning. China's history is inevitably entering a new era.

I. The Information Blockade Mechanism That Wrought This National Catastrophe

The plot unfolds like a fairy tale or fable: collective deception triggers massive signal disruption, leading to catastrophic retribution for the entire community of life.

Over decades, Chinese society has grown increasingly prosperous, yet far from achieving national stability and public well-being. Not only has the reform and opening-up policy imposed self-imposed restrictions and self-limitations, but the collective self-interest of the Chinese Communist Party in rejecting fundamental political reform has also led to the resurgence of new "rigidity and regression." In terms of ideological control, since 2013, the previous institutionalized lying has escalated to the highest level of collective deception: On one front, a massive subtraction: suppressing Southern Weekly, shutting down Yanhuang Chunqiu, revoking thousands of online opinion leader accounts while massively blocking groups, arresting and harshly sentencing courageous voices advocating freedom, democracy, and idealism, as well as rights defenders—gagging the people and silencing the masses. On the other hand, they have intensified efforts, mobilizing the entire nation's resources to proactively create a fabricated reality—a fairy-tale, allegorical "Kingdom of Lies." This is achieved through vast secret police and thought police apparatuses, hundreds of thousands of informants or paid commentators, and the Leviathan of big data.Within this "Kingdom of Lies," the achievements stemming from free-market reforms and partial decentralization are attributed to the superiority of the centralized system. The accomplishments of pragmatic predecessors are credited to the current regime, despite its limited track record of independent successes. Second-rate technologies acquired through imitation and catch-up are exaggerated

into cutting-edge innovations, heralding "How amazing my country is!"...The pervasive fog of lies permeates the nation, numbing both the populace and the officials, dumbing down the people while simultaneously dumbing down the rulers.

Much like the 1958 fairy-tale-like collective deception of the "satellite-launching" campaign that precipitated the Great Famine, this national calamity is far more man-made than natural. The core details of this man-made disaster are darkly ironic: instead of controlling the virus, the government controlled the eight doctors who first cried out, "SARS is here!" In a place where frontline workers could only issue vague warnings, the machinery of violence brutally demanded precise language. When those with knowledge at the front lines were silenced, and the highway of free information was blocked, the virus freely invaded the unguarded human reservoir, freely taking control of the unaware populace. On December 29, Hubei Provincial Hospital of Integrated Traditional Chinese and Western Medicine reported seven infections, including a family of three. Yet after the National Health Commission's first expert team rushed to Wuhan for investigation, they publicly declared the virus "does not transmit between humans." Before the statement had even faded, team leader Wang Guangfa discovered he himself had contracted the virus!

Worse still, the overarching directive of this collective deception campaign—"politics first" (rather than facts or truth)—was explicitly issued as an administrative order to the health system, silencing frontline doctors. On January 2, China Central Television (CCTV), acting as the "state mouthpiece," announced that "eight individuals spreading rumors had been dealt with." This act transformed CCTV into an amplifier of lies that contributed to this man-made disaster. The newly born "Nation of Lies" thus primarily applied its "concentrated strength to accomplish major tasks" toward a nationwide information blockade to serve political needs. Consequently, the severe "human-to-human transmission" outbreak was concealed for twenty days. Citizens, who had consistently trusted the government's information and credibility, unwittingly opened themselves to the novel coronavirus. Wuhan thus missed its optimal window for containment, allowing cases to grow exponentially and the epidemic to rapidly spiral out of control.

Mobilizing the entire state apparatus, the regime slandered the life-saving warnings of eight frontline doctors about "the virus is here" as "rumors," redefining common sense and rationality about "rumors" to serve political ends. This created massive blockages in the natural channels of information dissemination among hundreds of millions of people on the eve of the virus's massive invasion. This information blockade mechanism is what precipitated this national catastrophe. The officials, internet administrators, and informants who have long participated in constructing and operating this information blockade mechanism, along with the police officers who may themselves be victims of this disaster—unintentionally harming others, themselves, and their loved ones—should feel a pang of conscience in the face of such a devastating man-made catastrophe.

II. The Crisis Exposes China's Seriously Diminished State Capacity

The Chinese government, at all levels, handled a viral outbreak that was not of the highest danger level as if it were an earth-shattering catastrophe. Hundreds of millions of people fled, hid, panicked, and grieved as if they were experiencing the sinking of the Titanic. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of lives were lost to COVID-19 infection, and tens of thousands more were already infected. Numerous shocking and heartbreaking reports appeared online: After the lockdown, infected individuals in Wuhan rushed to hospitals seeking treatment, only to face delays in testing, diagnosis, or emergency admission. Countless patients waited in line for over ten hours until their last breath; others visited three or four hospitals in vain, their bodies and minds shattered. Some coughed up blood uncontrollably in waiting rooms, while tragic cases of individuals collapsing and dying in hospital corridors emerged. Others watched family members fall ill while their calls to admission hotlines went perpetually unanswered, helplessly witnessing their households infected one by one until the last member lay dying. Life seemed as worthless as an insect, spawning countless human tragedies and humanitarian disasters.

There were also immense, invisible, and profound losses: To prevent the virus from spreading, administrative bodies at all levels, gripped by excessive fear, implemented wartime-like controls as if fending off an alien invasion. Roads, shops, and villages were sealed off nationwide, instantly

freezing social life and causing widespread economic stagnation. Rarely discussed is how vital the economic vitality of the coming year is to people's livelihoods, health, and lives. How many "premature deaths" among the impoverished and medically vulnerable will result indirectly from the foreseeable trillions in economic losses and massive unemployment?

As the liberal thinker Xiao Shu has observed, lockdowns are not a moderate or prudent political maneuver; they are far from optimal. Yet even when implemented, lockdowns require a balanced combination of measures—adjusting restrictions, fine-tuning social sentiment, and preserving mechanisms to sustain vitality. The current nationwide spectacle—externally eerily quiet yet internally gripped by excessive panic—sufficiently demonstrates that those in power are often blind to the situation. Most decision-makers are not professional strategists; officials at all levels severely lack basic administrative capabilities, crisis management skills for handling major variables, and the systemic equilibrium required to navigate a massive society.

Several critical details bear this out: The outbreak erupted in late December, yet the CCP's highest leadership did not establish an epidemic task force until January 25th—the first day of the Lunar New Year. Is this the legendary "China speed"? After lockdowns were imposed, severe shortages of emergency and protective supplies plagued frontline hospitals—unbelievably occurring in provinces with trillion-yuan annual revenues and across China itself, with its 18 trillion yuan national income! The rapid construction of Huoshenshan Hospital was indeed inspiring. Yet how many infected individuals over the following fortnight could not access hospitals, leading to worsening conditions or life-threatening situations? Why did those in overall command not immediately, upon issuing the lockdown order on January 23rd, requisition fifty middle schools, colleges, and university buildings within Wuhan city, along with various venues, to serve as temporary emergency centers? Why did they not mobilize five hundred medical teams from other provinces for urgent support? This would have required nothing more than a section chief or division director at the Ministry of Emergency Management to sketch out an operational plan on a few sheets of paper and make a few revisions. This plan should have been ready in the ministry's archives all along. A leader who truly prioritizes the

lives of ordinary citizens above all else and possesses decisive character could have signed off on it immediately.

On February 3rd, Zhang Xiaochun, a medical imaging expert and doctoral advisor at Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University, posted on WeChat Moments that numerous suspected patients in Wuhan—whose nucleic acid tests were negative but whose CT scans showed positive findings—were only required to undergo home quarantine. This resulted in widespread family cluster infections. Professor Zhang urged authorities to replace nucleic acid testing with CT imaging for diagnosis, shift home quarantine to centralized treatment in public facilities, and mobilize community resources. Otherwise, the limited medical staff would be overwhelmed by tens of thousands of asymptomatic or deteriorating patients under observation. Clearly, had thousands or tens of thousands of patients with CT-confirmed "positive" results been urgently transferred to fifty temporary public facilities for isolation and treatment starting January 23rd, the current widespread household cluster infections could have been avoided. Frankly, the large-scale requisitioning of venues was a solution immediately conceived and proposed by several netizens. Why did those in overall command lack this basic foresight?

Over a decade ago, a former Shanghai vice mayor who served before 1978 once remarked to me: New York City’s emergency response during the 9/11 attacks wasn’t flawless. Had rescuers dug a temporary tunnel from the nearby subway to the collapsed Twin Towers, they might have saved a dozen lives. This unconventional idea immediately piqued my interest. I asked him how he arrived at this conclusion. He replied that as the deputy mayor in charge of disaster relief, he often received emergency calls at 2 a.m. to handle floods, fires, and other crises requiring immediate action. Over time, he developed a habit of constantly seeking more ingenious rescue strategies.

When you assume the role of Party Secretary or Chief Executive, your foremost duty is to honor the public trust and safeguard citizens' lives and health. This demands foresight, planning, and preparedness drills for every conceivable crisis scenario. If you lack crisis management awareness, have not spent decades gathering, contemplating, and accumulating crisis management experience, yet relentlessly pursue greater power and unlimited centralization, you are nothing but a pretentious charlatan.

One needn't consult professional analysts; even ordinary citizens can observe through this incident that the Chinese government's state capacity, administrative efficiency, and public cohesion have significantly diminished. Since combating the SARS outbreak in 2003, the capabilities of the people in China have naturally progressed, while those of the officials have strangely regressed. Much like the decline seen in imperial dynasties after generations of succession, the pinnacle of the Party-State pyramid has fallen prey to the "Law of Declining Core Leadership in Political Privileged Classes." Mediocrity in governance has become its dominant theme, with China's finest political, managerial, and strategic talents no longer residing within the Party-State establishment. Particularly in recent years, under the centralization-driven selection and appointment mechanisms, a third "formal rule" has emerged alongside the conventional principles of fairness and efficiency: personal loyalty or dependency. This has spawned unprecedented "unfair personnel practices." The phenomenon of "lazy governance and administrative inaction," repeatedly criticized by official media, stems from multiple causes. Among these is the passive resistance of various individuals within the system against the increasingly severe "unfair personnel practices." However, the root cause lies in the reverse selection mechanism—where the unfit prevail over the fit—inevitably produced by totalitarian authoritarianism. Overall, the tree's core is rapidly rotting, yet ordinary citizens remain the first and ultimate victims.

III. The Fundamental Conflict Between Unlimited Centralization and the Natural Order of the Information Society

Faced with the sudden pandemic, the nation-state apparatus proved as fragile as a paper lantern—pierced at the slightest touch. In political science and management theory, the COVID-19 crisis delivered a resounding veto against the notion of "pooling resources to tackle major challenges."

On January 27, Wuhan Mayor Zhou Xianwang disclosed on CCTV the core fact that "as a local government, I can only release information after obtaining authorization." Speaking with steady composure and seasoned poise, this mayor appeared to be a latent talent. While his crisis management skills left much to be desired, his courage to speak truth at a critical moment—instantly revealing the original reality to the nation—was commendable.

The nation now knows: Hubei's "higher authorities" blocked critical information, robbing Wuhan's officials and citizens of twenty crucial days to combat the outbreak—a failure that led to the current disaster. In recent years, the system emphasizing "the Party leads everything—east, west, north, south, central; Party, government, military, civilian, academic" has continuously centralized power, concentrating it in one person, one authority—reminiscent of the Mao era. However, no individual—including Mr. Xi Jinping—possesses the capacity to achieve efficient governance of a massive society through "unlimited centralization," despite their ability to concentrate power further and further. The transformation of a "moderate epidemic" into a "catastrophic disaster" through deliberate manipulation stands as irrefutable proof.

Looking back at human history, "pooling resources to accomplish great things" has been rare. Setting aside political systems, purely in terms of achievements, even the most fascist and totalitarian states—Qin China and Nazi Germany—thrived under decentralization and collapsed under centralization, as evidenced by the Tiger-Hiding Earth Qin Bamboo Slips and the Memoirs of Manchurian. High centralization and "unlimited centralization" cannot yield greater efficiency—why? Because two fundamental principles of mathematical physics are at work: the principle of incomplete diffusion of specific information and the principle of incomplete diffusion of local causality. The inherent dispersion of frontline actions and causal events in human life leads to the inherent dispersion of frontline information. It is common knowledge that information distorts during transmission, suffering losses at every stage (as exemplified by our CDC academicians), incurring substantial societal costs. More critically, frontline information in emergencies and original actions possesses a countdown quality—it cannot tolerate long-distance or slow transmission, for such delays often spell catastrophe. Thus, emergency responses and original actions demand local decision-making. According to the natural order of an information society, the authority to announce infectious disease outbreaks should inherently reside within a two-hour subway commute of the epidemic center, not within Zhongnanhai. "Infinite centralization"—where one person controls everything—inevitably violates this natural order, resulting in inefficiency. Its inherent nature is not accidental but rather characterized by

clumsiness, sluggishness, and the potential to cause catastrophic consequences.

In today's information society, information is the primary resource, the driving force behind material power. The fundamental behavioral structure of this society is a naturally flat, decentralized, and pluralistic framework. Within it, every frontline position should possess some decision-making authority, and decentralization or self-governance should be implemented everywhere. The unprecedented national mobilization against the novel coronavirus has fully demonstrated that China's current totalitarian political system—devoid of freedom of speech and the press, free elections and multiparty competition, checks and balances and accountability mechanisms, federalism and local autonomy—lags severely behind the fundamental requirements of an information society. Implementing a monolithic, authoritarian, and infinitely centralized system in the information age is nothing short of officials defying the natural laws and cosmic principles of this era—a regression against history. Without fundamental political reform, the Chinese people will face greater, even catastrophic, man-made disasters and setbacks. Management theory's Murphy's Law states that if something can go wrong, it will. This holds true whenever the underlying structure is flawed. This is not a guessing game or a gamble, but a causal principle unique to human society.

In our highly centralized, low-human-rights society, where officials have long held power while citizens remain weak, hundreds of millions of people—like unnatural greenhouse plants—have developed immense dependence on the government for information and trust. Once many "rumors" were discovered to be "remarkably prescient prophecies," people experienced unprecedented disillusionment, lost all faith in the government, and instead turned to blindly believing all manner of alarmist legends. Over the past fifteen days, Chinese society has regressed overnight into a pre-modern state of collective irrationality. Governments at all levels have amplified nationwide panic through wartime-like measures, creating a resonance between officials and citizens that has greatly exacerbated the secondary effects of the disaster. Clearly, population quality alone cannot explain this classic case of "mass panic" destined to be recorded in history. The deeper principle lies in how the legal structure of information

dissemination shapes social psychology.

IV. Only Political Sovereignty Can Secure Autonomy Over One's Destiny

In the face of disaster, people are self-rescuing. The resilient and dignified people of Hubei are bearing the crisis with dignity and supporting one another, which is truly admirable. Some volunteers, driving medical staff to and from work without pay, have contracted the disease and even paid with their precious lives, truly deserving the title of humanitarian heroes.

In a "nation of lies," the most precious resource is "truth-telling." Facing harsh ideological control, digital authoritarianism, and an information blockade that disregards human life, frontline doctors and nurses spoke out about core information vital to public health and safety. Ordinary citizens voiced their support for everyone's right to truth-telling and called for political systems that effectively safeguard this right. This is a cause of the highest order, possessing paramount moral value and social significance at this very moment.

Among the eight doctors falsely accused of "spreading rumors," Li Wenliang publicly released his police admonishment letter, demonstrating the spirit of a "truth-telling hero" for the second time—only to tragically succumb to the disease himself! Dr. Hu Dianbo, under his real name, of Hubei Aerospace Hospital, revealed that Wuhan's fever cases might exceed 100,000. Though officials ignored the warning, the public became vigilant. Citizen Xiao Shu published a series of articles in foreign media criticizing authoritarian politics; citizen Chen Qiuzhi conducted on-site video reporting; citizen Fang Bin filmed the reality of body collection trucks... (May more shining names be added here in the future!)

Yet authentic frontline voices remain stifled. After contributing to this catastrophic disaster, the Central Propaganda Department shows no remorse, continuing internet censorship and silencing dissent. Reports indicate the department mandated strict censorship of all media coverage related to the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak starting February 3rd. This reveals that without the constant pressure and checks from hundreds of millions of citizens, digital authoritarianism and the "1984" system will never learn from its mistakes—its nature remains unchanged.

Some outraged citizens have demanded "information transparency,"

and officials have promised to "improve the epidemic early warning and prevention system." Yet these are merely minor "reforms." Reforms are utterly insufficient and will inevitably backfire. This is ruled by man, not the rule of law, lacking institutional safeguards. "Reform" remains a variant of enslavement—a prettier new set of shackles. They seek to evade the world's torrent of condemnation through "reform," hoping to muddle through. They will return with renewed force, inflicting even greater harm upon us.

How many well-meaning citizens, long numbed in their thinking, refuse to confront the truth: unlimited centralization is the most dangerous political system in human history. Having shed all institutional checks and balances, internal and external restraints, it inevitably spirals toward boundless chaos and excess, inevitably bringing disaster upon the world. We cannot adopt a spectator's mindset of "let it run wild and see how it ends," for we, the people, are both the first and ultimate bearers of its calamities. Since this system of unlimited power has taken root among us, it will inevitably push us step by step toward the abyss. This generation, these billions of compatriots, must save themselves and must stop it. Since the chariot of "unlimited centralization" began its roll in late 2017, China's national fortunes have declined, and society has suffered severe wounds. The people are not fools. Look around: in recent years, how many catastrophic mistakes has it committed? Stumbling from one error to the next, it has botched nearly every major economic, human rights, diplomatic, and strategic endeavor. How many more rights can it strip from us? How much more of our heritage can it squander? The brutal man-made disaster of this widespread viral outbreak has now touched the very core of our lives, our health, and our survival. If we do not fight back, resist, and root out this evil now, will we simply allow this system of unlimited centralization to reduce decades of peace and prosperity to ashes, pushing our generation into the abyss of stagnation, turmoil, and internal strife?

Some within the system may still cling to fantasies of reverting to the pre-2017 or pre-2013 era. But first, the power dynamics within the system no longer allow for such buffers or transitional paths. Second, the populace has now awakened on a massive scale. Whether new or old authoritarianism, the old tunes have played their last. The people's patience has reached its limit, and their anger is unstoppable. Almost overnight, countless decent

citizens have come to understand that only when the people hold political sovereignty, elect their leaders, and control the government can similar man-made disasters be prevented. The people's own political awakening is the fundamental path to self-rescue.

Conservatism is human nature, especially among ordinary citizens who have enjoyed decades of peace and prosperity. They yearn to preserve their happiness, build upon it, and advance toward a golden age. Yet this golden age has not arrived—it has already passed. This wave of peaceful prosperity lacked the foundation of modern political civilization. It was merely the fortune of opportunistic upstarts, not the legacy of a time-honored scholarly lineage.

Leaders cannot be relied upon; governments cannot be relied upon. This is an immutable truth of history. In this hour of peril for ordinary citizens, their conduct has proven them especially untrustworthy. When crisis strikes, they invariably abandon us. Even without natural calamities, they wield their power recklessly to impose man-made disasters upon our heads. Only we can save ourselves. Only by exercising political sovereignty and rights can we achieve true autonomy over our destiny. Only by establishing a constitutional democracy under popular sovereignty can our society attain genuine dignity, happiness, and enduring stability.

V. The Prerequisite for Successful Political Transition: The Historical Alliance Between the Common People and the Official Class

The calamity of unlimited centralization struck with such ferocity and speed that even those who foresaw it were stunned. Yet attributing its causes and consequences solely to the personal history or political preferences of a single leader would be simplistic. The system of unlimited centralization is the offspring of the "post-totalitarianism with checks and balances" that emerged since 1992. Like mother and child sharing familial traits, according to Murphy's Law, given the opportunity, the major political elements—imperial ambitions, Legalist iron-fisted rule, autocratic decision-making, and comprehensive control—will inevitably undergo a chemical reaction. As the ancient saying goes: A boat against the current either advances or retreats. The Party-State's long-standing rejection of fundamental political reform will inevitably breed violent aberrations.

Whether totalitarian, post-totalitarian, neo-totalitarian, or infinitely centralized, these regimes are fundamentally cut from the same cloth. They all reject constitutional democracy, monopolize power, strip citizens of political rights, and brutally suppress dissent. Therefore, no matter how it patches or reforms itself, it cannot abandon its backward, pre-modern political system. Without establishing the fundamental principles of constitutional democracy, totalitarian autocracy runs rampant, forming the most profound political cancer afflicting the Chinese nation. The man-made disaster of this widespread viral outbreak and the series of failures in "national affairs" over recent years stand as the latest evidence of the worsening "cancer" within China's political system.

The year 2020 stands as a historical juncture where calamity and awakening converge—a moment demanding both immediate crisis relief and far-sighted vision, a turning point requiring the timely eradication of the novel coronavirus alongside the launch of a project to cure the political "cancer."

A pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy represents the political truth best suited to China's soil and the needs of the Chinese nation—the cure for China's political "cancer." Yet transforming this political truth into a living reality demands profound moral discipline and operational wisdom from this generation of Chinese people. As one thinker aptly observed: "The struggle for freedom demands both courageous risk-taking and prudent balancing of factors to prevent major self-inflicted failures, for such failures only weigh down the people's shackles."

We must respect the conservative mindset of hundreds of millions of sovereign citizens toward their cherished way of life. We must, as far as possible, pursue a smooth and peaceful transition in the political transformation already underway. Advocates of liberal democracy—especially the moderate, conservative school of the "constitutional democracy movement"—should stand united with the mainstream populace of over a billion people in upholding those time-honored convictions that align with natural and human principles, free from exclusivity or destructiveness. We must share the destiny of our ancestral homeland. No fundamental change should permit ordinary citizens and well-intentioned officials to become the ultimate victims. No "transitional pains" should be

allowed to capsize the vessel we stand upon.

We should learn from the humanitarian ideals of our ancestors, Confucius, Mencius, and Mozi, advancing the cause of freedom through peaceful benevolence, compassion, and empathy. The independent civil society, having endured severe suppression, remains weak and primarily engages in moral critique. Yet it must anticipate future uncertainties from afar, vigilantly guarding against repeating the moral and strategic errors that led to the collapse of the "King of the Rebellion's" Beijing occupation in 1644 after a mere 42 days. Upon entering Beijing, Li Zicheng committed two critical errors: First, he had the group of chancellors and generals who had secretly harbored hopes for the rebel army tied to trees and tortured to extract their ill-gotten gold and treasures. This act chilled the hearts of the Ming dynasty's bureaucratic class across the nation, who had been observing the situation, causing them to distance themselves. Second, he permitted his subordinates to insult Wu Sangui's father and beloved concubine, forcing the 100,000-strong Shanhai Pass garrison—the nation's last line of defense—to defect. This drove them into the arms of the ruthless foreign enemy. Months earlier, Emperor Chongzhen twice proposed redeploying Shanhai Pass's 100,000 defenders—the nation's last line of defense—to Beijing against Li Zicheng's forces. Yet his chancellors and ministers obstructed both attempts by prostrating themselves in tears. Among the ministers, there remained a sense of the greater good—prioritizing the nation's security over individual lives—but Li Zicheng's faction possessed none. Had the "King of the Rebels" swiftly and successfully forged a political alliance between the commoners and the bureaucracy upon entering the capital, Chinese history would have unfolded quite differently.

Throughout human history, the Athenian city-state achieved a historic grand compromise between the commoners and the aristocracy before establishing the first generation of political democracy and creating its brilliant classical civilization. Similarly, ancient Rome secured a major electoral compromise between the plebeians and the patricians before entering its era of prosperity. For contemporary China to establish a great constitutional democracy and create a new, world-historical classical civilization, it must first achieve a historic grand compromise between the common people and the official class domestically. This critical task must

be resolved; it cannot be bypassed.

VI. As a Citizen, My Well-Intended Advice to Public Servant Xi Jinping

The foremost question now is how we view Mr. Xi Jinping, the chief architect of the system of unlimited centralization. If Mr. Xi were to sincerely apologize and reflect on his role in creating this "man-made disaster," end unlimited centralization, implement major reforms, and initiate fundamental political change, he could regain the trust of hundreds of millions of sovereign citizens nationwide. "Confucius did not overdo it"—the Chinese people are inherently kind and forgiving.

Accountability, criticism, and oversight of leaders are the rightful political prerogatives of sovereign citizens. The overwhelming criticism, condemnation, and even furious rebukes currently flooding the internet represent the immediate counterattack of sovereign citizens against those responsible for this immense man-made disaster—it is righteous indignation, a natural ecological response. "A gentleman loves others through virtue." At this very moment, the furious denunciations from countless citizens also reflect, in a way, their care for Mr. Xi Jinping as a public servant. After the September 18th Incident, the nationwide condemnation of Chiang Kai-shek spurred the still-conscientious Chiang to resolve to resist Japan with increasing resolve. Ultimately, by leading the eight-year War of Resistance, he became a great national hero, following in the footsteps of Yue Fei. From 1989 to 1992, intense domestic and international criticism of Deng Xiaoping prompted the still-rational leader to break decisively with the dogma of planned economies, formally introducing the "market economy" and thereby turning the tide of history. Mr. Xi Jinping's current predicament bears some resemblance to theirs. Does he possess sufficient conscience or reason to directly confront the torrent of global criticism and condemnation, aligning with the principles of heaven and humanity to take proactive action, thereby redeeming himself in the annals of eternal history?

Setting aside political transformation for now, let us focus purely on the human dimension. Facing citizens' righteous criticism with integrity presents Mr. Xi Jinping with an opportunity to demonstrate "a man's magnanimity." When Dong Qiongyao splashed ink on Xi Jinping's portrait in Shanghai, it could have been dismissed with a laugh. In today's open era, even if

dissenters throw eggs or tomatoes at the head of state himself, what's the big deal? Had Xi casually made light of it, tacitly acknowledging this as a citizen's right to dissent, the nation would have deeply admired his magnanimity. Many parents would surely hold up such magnanimity as a model for their children. Yet Xi's subordinates committed Dong to a psychiatric hospital and medicated her. How will history record this?

Setting aside political transformation for now, let us focus purely on humanity. Professor Xu Zhangrun, Mr. Xi Jinping's former colleague and mentor at Tsinghua University, recently published an online article strongly condemning the totalitarian politics of monopolizing everything and establishing a single authority as the root cause of this severe human tragedy. Regardless of their political stances, could Mr. Xi invite Professor Xu to a casual meal at Zhongnanhai, Tsinghua University, or elsewhere to hear him share anecdotes unrelated to politics? Afterward, Professor Xu could continue advocating democracy and freedom, while Mr. Xi could persist in asserting "the Party's leadership over everything." Yet how many Chinese compatriots, myself included, would then recognize Mr. Xi as truly possessing "a man's magnanimity"!

Returning to the topic of political transition. I have always advocated that citizens have the full right to criticize the government and its officials in public, including the right to point fingers. Of course, I firmly oppose any personal attacks and consistently advocate "addressing the issue, not the person." I particularly believe the root cause lies in the invisible post-totalitarian and infinitely centralized system, while any specific, living individual can be persuaded, changed, and coexist with.

Born into a poor family, I have spent years striving to directly or indirectly assist marginalized communities in achieving self-reliance or defending their rights. Over the past six years, while imprisoned due to a political injustice engineered by Mr. Xi Jinping, I have nonetheless consistently praised the "targeted poverty alleviation initiative" vigorously promoted by both Mr. Xi and Mr. Li Zhanshu—even though I know it is driven by populist considerations and harbors significant exaggerations! I also believe that through a constitutional democratic system, the "Targeted Poverty Alleviation Project" could potentially serve as a starting point for building a sustainable "welfare state based on self-reliance." Many

passionate fellow liberals might find this laughable! But what I express here is my genuine conviction and the core principle I have held for decades. I have always maintained that authoritarians and liberals are fellow countrymen, differing only in political views. Any competition or confrontation over ideals and values must maintain a certain measure and respect a final line. As long as authoritarians turn toward constitutional democracy, we liberals will surely respond with sincere and warm recognition and acceptance. If in 2020, Mr. Xi Jinping and Mr. Li Zhanshu, alongside the widely popular Mr. Li Keqiang, were to push the National People's Congress to ratify the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, promote substantial press freedom, and then within the next two years facilitate the CCP's transformation from a totalitarian party into an electoral party—thereby helping the constitutional democracy system resolve half the challenges inherent in a two-party system—our rights defense movement would gladly dedicate another thirty years to defending the rights of these three Chinese citizens.

True idealists of freedom and democracy harbor goodwill toward all compatriots. We embrace every fellow citizen who accepts constitutional democracy. At the vast roundtable spanning ten million square kilometers, not one soul should be left behind. Even the much-criticized State Security Bureau and Global Times can be harnessed through the art of "making them work harder by exploiting their shortcomings," civilly compelling them to labor exceptionally hard for China's future welfare state or balanced freedom of speech.

May this generation not have endured this calamity and tribulation in vain. May the painful burdens borne by the people of Wuhan not be squandered. May natural conscience and sound reason become the true rulers in the hearts of all our compatriots!

May heaven bless our Hubei compatriots, may heaven bless our 1.4 billion compatriots, may heaven bless the Chinese nation!

Evening of February 6, 2020, to Morning of February 7, 2020

The Primary Value of Freedom of Speech and Separation of Powers as Seen Through the "Anti-Epidemic Celebrity Rankings"

(Part One)

In China, the right wing does the work while the far left takes the credit; the right wing focuses on practicality while the far left clings to dogma; the right wing studies and adapts global free-market economies, local decentralization, and modern management practices, while the far left labels the achievements of liberalization as the superiority of totalitarian control.

After the first phase of the devastating COVID-19 "national crisis" temporarily concluded, the rigid ultra-left forces, dormant for months, began shifting blame and reconstructing narratives. They rebranded the hard-won achievements, where dedicated doctors, pragmatic system insiders, and free citizens bravely broke through authoritarian constraints to overcome the crisis and save lives.

Yet those who conceal truth and distort history will face history's stern judgment. The self-isolated inevitably fall into the same trap twice; those who persist in self-deception may stumble a third or fourth time. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of citizens often bear the brunt of such "man-made disasters" wrought by those in power. Therefore, for the sake of self-rescue and self-reliance, we must commit to revealing the core truths of the first phase of the COVID-19 response. This will partially restore and illuminate the underlying mechanisms that played a dominant role, enabling conscientious citizens to continue our great political awakening process with more comprehensive information.

The pandemic is far from over, and its secondary effects—such as economic depression, mass unemployment, and the return of the middle class to poverty—have become a frightening reality in China today. Moreover, the pandemic has escalated into a global catastrophe, constituting the most significant worldwide event since the end of World War II. Human society's

fundamental way of life and the modes of interaction between nations may undergo profound changes as a result. "Third-order negative effects"—such as mounting international pressure and a new wave of global manufacturing relocation—loom darkly over mainland China, which has only temporarily found relief. Situated at the epicenter of this great crisis, the Chinese nation must achieve a unity that is more profound and effective than ever before.

But this unity must be grounded in humanitarian and rule-based civility among 1.4 billion people. It must be a unity among citizens characterized by independent personalities, constructive criticism, and a shared commitment to freedom and democracy. It should not be the false ideological uniformity of enslaved subjects, nor the mechanistic, synchronized conformity of ant or bee colonies driven by biochemical processes.

As the ancients said: "When the wisdom of the masses is gathered, nothing is beyond their reach."Yet the fundamental prerequisite for integrating collective wisdom is freedom of information and freedom of speech. If the voices of the people are silenced, if scattered wisdom from the front lines lacks a public platform to emerge, and if there are no real channels for dissemination and mutual stimulation—where high-pressure confinement prevails everywhere, fear permeates every corner, and people communicate only through glances—then "pooling collective wisdom and strength" becomes nothing but a pipe dream!

To nourish the sound judgment of awakening citizens with authentic, multidimensional information about current actions, this article introduces a unique "Pandemic Response Celebrity Ranking" and provides concise analysis, evaluation, and critique of the selected figures' deeds. My commentary strives for objectivity, prudence, and inclusivity, endeavoring to articulate sufficient rationale for significant judgments rather than expressing personal preferences dogmatically. Crucially, my reasoning rests upon a fundamental logical premise: the natural sovereignty perspective of independent citizens and a conscious stance of political sovereignty.

Some may argue that this is a time for profound criticism of systemic failures and officials' moral accountability, making it inappropriate to select any "anti-pandemic celebrities." My view is precisely the opposite. Evaluating figures is a tradition in Chinese history. A major event inevitably produces several prominent individuals—and indeed, several have emerged.

Those who hold positions of responsibility yet fail to distinguish themselves during such times must harbor significant flaws in their character or motives. Refusing to acknowledge the emerging figures of the pandemic response and rejecting a positive, constructive assessment of its achievements directly cedes the dominant discourse, vast space, and valuable resources to rigid ultra-left forces, allowing them to mislead the public who lack sufficient information and face conceptual confusion. For liberal democratic ideas to gain genuine acceptance among hundreds of millions of compatriots, they must penetrate the fabric of daily life, uncover truths, and expose the underlying structures of phenomena. They must consistently speak to the heart of matters rather than merely apply abstract principles to the complex, ever-changing realities of life, thereby giving the public the impression that they are impractical and detached. Truth benefits the awakened, the upright, and the doers most, while it undermines the "nation of lies," the "second Boxer Rebellion," and dogmatism. The day truth spreads is the day lies crumble. Moreover, free citizens must not content themselves with mere "public discourse." This generation must ultimately achieve constitutional democracy through pure ideals and profound virtue, as well as through sophisticated, systematic, and balanced operational capabilities. In principle, every open-minded individual with conviction can compile their own "rankings of pandemic heroes." The process of establishing, evaluating, and justifying these rankings is itself a learning experience in contemporary governance.

China's First-Phase COVID-19 Response Celebrity Ranking

First Place: Zhou Xianwang, Mayor of Wuhan

1. Zhou Xianwang is a highly controversial figure. Between January 23 and March of this year (2020), the Mayor of Wuhan became one of the primary targets of public condemnation and ridicule online. Does he deserve to be ranked first on the pandemic response honor roll?

My rationale for ranking Zhou Xianwang first is as follows:

(1) After receiving authorization from the State Council under the principle of "local jurisdiction responsibility"—a decentralized decision-making framework—Zhou Xianwang decisively implemented the city lockdown.

While this decision was undoubtedly based on strategic advice from scientist Li Wenjuan, Li's role was limited to "planning." As mayor of Wuhan, Zhou's role was to "decide"—select the optimal course of action, act decisively, and ensure thorough implementation. In a January 27 interview with CCTV, Zhou Xianwang explained his rationale for the lockdown: "Throughout human history, major infectious diseases like the Black Death, plague, and smallpox posed unimaginable threats, causing catastrophic death tolls. Could the novel coronavirus pneumonia we face today follow the same path? No one could say for certain. At that moment, the only option was decisive action: closing the city gates to contain those potentially infected within this circle, preventing them from spreading the disease further. By sealing them within their homes, they could not infect others within the city. That is the purpose of a lockdown." The novel coronavirus is highly contagious. Zhou Xianwang undoubtedly possessed more information than the general public at the time, likely aware that tens of thousands (or more) in Wuhan had already contracted the disease. At this critical juncture, perhaps only the seemingly crude measure of "lockdown" could prevent an outbreak already spiraling out of control due to "human error" from becoming a catastrophic disaster. Thus, the effective collaboration between expert authority and administrative power—Li Lanjuan's "strategy" and Zhou Xianwang's "decisiveness"—constituted a tangible and effective lifesaving measure.

Independent scholar Zhang Jie's critique that the lockdown failed to follow necessary legal procedures is compelling. The decision to lock down Wuhan disregarded crucial procedural norms—a grave error that paved the way for the abuse of "wartime management" and potentially set a dangerous precedent for future military rule. Such consequences are perilous and must never be repeated.

The lockdown policy package also failed to provide substantive safeguards for the daily necessities and medical access of seven million residents. Crucially, it lacked legal mechanisms to prevent, balance, or remedy the severe infringement of fundamental human rights caused by overly rigid restrictions. Nevertheless, the lockdown decision itself constituted a major and effective crisis management measure, serving as a necessary and relatively viable "third option."

(2) During an interview with China Central Television, Zhou Xianwang revealed the core truth behind the loss of twenty critical days in Wuhan's pandemic response—a period crucial for both officials and citizens. This disclosure allowed hundreds of millions of people to understand the primary root cause of this devastating man-made disaster.

According to reports, CCTV had originally planned to interview a Wuhan vice mayor, but upon hearing this, Mayor Zhou Xianwang proactively requested to be interviewed instead. It appears he came prepared with key talking points to disclose to CCTV, such as: "As a local government, I can only release information after obtaining authorization....the State Council...requires territorial responsibility. Since then, we've taken a much more proactive approach in our work." Given the legal tradition of sacrificing innocent lives to stabilize morale during crises, Zhou's disclosure of the truth was essentially a rational act of self-preservation. It is now widely known that on January 1st, the State Council expert team had already investigated and confirmed the emergence of an unknown pneumonia-causing agent in Wuhan. On January 3rd and 4th, Gao Fu, Director of the Chinese CDC, issued urgent notifications to the World Health Organization and the United States, respectively. Yet at this time, the domestic public was kept in the dark by the government. Li Wenliang and seven other whistleblowers were summoned by the police and slandered by CCTV as "rumor-mongers." Later, the critical information about human-to-human transmission was deliberately concealed. This demonstrates that the deception during the first twenty days of January was indeed a deliberate, comprehensive information blockade implemented by Wuhan's "higher authorities." Within these twenty days, the number of infected individuals rapidly escalated from dozens or hundreds to tens of thousands, and possibly more. Clearly, the primary responsibility for the epidemic spiraling out of control lies with the decision-making mechanism that enforced this comprehensive information blockade—the newly established "unlimited centralized authority system." This system stripped secondary and tertiary management levels of their emergency response authority over highly contagious diseases. At a critical juncture, Zhou Xianwang revealed the core truth, instantly clarifying for the nation where the information blockade originated. Overnight, countless citizens gained clarity, initiating reflection

and criticism of the "unlimited centralization system." Here, Zhou Xianwang transcended bureaucratic vices and servility, demonstrating the courage inherent in natural citizenship. Zhou Xianwang is regarded by the nation as the initiator of this year's "blame-shifting" movement, yet his "shifting blame" was fundamentally a refusal to take the fall. His act of "reasonable self-preservation" objectively promoted information freedom, but more crucially, only information freedom could enable him to achieve this "reasonable self-preservation."

(3) Following Professor Yu Fasheng's proposal and Vice Premier Sun Chunlan's decision to build makeshift hospitals, Zhou Xianwang demonstrated decisive execution, driving the rapid construction of 16 such facilities.

Following the city lockdown, the number of early patients surged dramatically. Hospitals lacked sufficient beds to accommodate them, leading to increasingly severe household cluster infections. The sheer number of patient deaths brought tears to medical staff and profound grief to the entire nation. In response, Professor Yu Fasheng of Central China Normal University submitted an operational proposal to the central government via a special report in the Guangming Daily on February 1: urgently requisition public venues to establish "fully enclosed" medical treatment centers integrating isolation, treatment, and living facilities. According to Ma Xiaowei, Director of the National Health Commission, Vice Premier Sun Chunlan decisively ordered Wuhan to immediately convert sports stadiums and convention centers into "cabin hospitals." At a press conference, Ma also praised Wuhan Mayor Zhou Xianwang for "shouldering immense pressure, taking command at the front lines, personally coordinating efforts, and working day and night to organize construction teams to rapidly establish cabin hospitals."Media reports indicate that the first three makeshift hospitals, with a combined capacity of 4,000 beds, were completed in just 29 hours. From February 5, when they began admitting patients, until March 10, when all were decommissioned, the 16 makeshift hospitals treated approximately 13,600 mildly ill patients. Remarkably, they achieved zero infections and deaths among patients, significantly curbing the virus's spread. While officials across Wuhan's districts exerted considerable effort to construct makeshift hospitals, Mayor Zhou Xianwang's decisive

leadership significantly boosted administrative efficiency. The model later inspired similar efforts worldwide in the fight against the pandemic.

Notably, Ma Xiaowei's explicit commendation of Zhou Xianwang carries deeper significance. As head of the National Health Commission, Ma himself faced nationwide public scrutiny and threats of blame-shifting from legalists—pressures mirroring those Zhou endured. His public recognition of Zhou's achievements was unlikely to please the bureaucrats. This act of rare impartiality also reflected a calculated concern for mutual vulnerability and a strategic "back-to-back self-rescue" approach. The principle that "freedom of information correlates positively with rational self-preservation amid power struggles" equally applies to this pragmatic leader.

(4) The core decision that truly resolved the crisis—“admitting all who should be admitted, treating all who should be treated”—was first pushed forward by Zhou Xianwang. This was the key to the key.

Where did the turning point in Wuhan's pandemic response lie? Some point to the construction of makeshift hospitals. Yet these facilities only treated mild cases. As of May 10, Wuhan had 50,339 confirmed patients, with 46,464 recoveries. Subtracting the 13,600 treated in makeshift hospitals, 32,864 were cured in primary or critical care hospitals—the true backbone of the effort and the real lifesaving challenge. Many also believe the "lockdown" was the turning point. The decisive lockdown on January 23rd, they argue, ensured victory in the fight against the epidemic. This is another specious argument. Ultimately, the epidemic would have been contained in any country, but the question is the cost. Human lives are paramount. If Wuhan's emergency response and treatment efficiency remained low after the lockdown, leading to catastrophic death tolls—say, hundreds of thousands or even millions—it would prove the lockdown a colossal failure. People would conclude that no lockdown might have been more effective than one.

The strategy that truly halted uncontrolled transmission and drastically reduced mortality—fully realizing the three principles of "controlling the source of infection, cutting off transmission routes, and protecting susceptible populations"—was "admitting all confirmed cases and treating all patients." According to media reports, this decision was made on February 9. On that day, Jiang Chaoliang, Secretary of the Hubei Provincial

Party Committee, convened a meeting at the Wuhan Epidemic Prevention and Control Headquarters, explicitly stating: "All confirmed and suspected patients identified through screening must be centrally admitted for treatment and categorized for isolation, ensuring all cases are admitted, and all patients are treated." Yet Zhou Xianwang, commander of the Wuhan Epidemic Prevention and Control Headquarters, was notably absent. Instead, he was rushing to several municipal colleges to oversee the conversion of dormitories into designated COVID-19 treatment centers. From this, we can reasonably infer that the "admit all who should be admitted, treat all who should be treated" policy was first proposed by Zhou Xianwang the previous night and endorsed by Jiang Chaoliang. The two then took separate actions the next day. Otherwise, Zhou Xianwang would have been completely clueless—it would be unthinkable for him to be absent when the provincial Party secretary convened an emergency meeting!!! Jiang Chaoliang and Zhou Xianwang were likely the actual decision-makers behind "admitting all who should be admitted and treating all who should be treated," with Zhou Xianwang serving as both "decision-maker and initiator." This decision subsequently gained approval from Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council and head of the Central Epidemic Response Group, elevating it to a national strategy.It was also around this time that makeshift hospitals transitioned from pilot projects to large-scale construction. In the preceding fortnight, approximately 10,000 medical personnel had arrived nationwide to assist; in the following fortnight, the State Council urgently mobilized over 30,000 more, bringing the total number of medical personnel supporting Hubei to 43,000. This further corroborates that "admitting all who should be admitted and treating all who should be treated" was the true turning point.

The core of the "admit all who should be admitted, treat all who should be treated" decision lay in expanding the scope of "admission"—admitting all CT-confirmed "suspected" patients for classification and isolation, rapidly expanding bed capacity by mass requisitioning public venues, and mobilizing medical personnel from all provinces to ensure treatment for every patient. This approach originated from emergency operational recommendations by Professor Zhang Xiaochun and independent citizens. However, such recommendations represent only the "strategy," while Zhou Xianwang's strength lies in his "decision-making." The link between strategy

and decision-making is freedom of speech with a spirit of resistance. Zhou's willingness to embrace cutting-edge information generated by this freedom of speech demonstrates his open-mindedness and non-dogmatic practical rationality. (This, of course, does not equate to democratic principles.)

Few have considered: had the "admit all who should be admitted, treat all who should be treated" approach been chosen on January 23rd, the excessively costly "lockdown" strategy would have been unnecessary!!!

In my personal view, the optimal response to this COVID-19 outbreak would have been: conducting an emergency assessment of emerging information on the evening of January 1st, followed by Hubei Province or the State Council deliberating in the morning of January 2nd and making a decision in the afternoon to classify it as "Category B infectious disease managed as Category A." This would have provided a five-day window for trial, error, and escalation, rather than pursuing a one-size-fits-all solution. (The optimal future approach would be for the National People's Congress to enact legislation granting prefecture-level administrative authorities within a two-kilometer radius of subway stations the decision-making power to handle severe infectious diseases, subject to approval by the prefecture-level People's Congress.) The next-best option would have been to begin mass requisitioning public venues starting January 23rd, admitting all patients without a city lockdown, allowing a five-day trial and escalation period. (Crisis management experts could swiftly draft proposals—this is no hindsight analysis!) If neither option is feasible, the third choice remains: "lockdown." On this matter, I still advocate a middle-ground approach, partly because lockdown is merely the last resort.

Amid sudden catastrophe and widespread panic, Zhou Xianwang managed to implement both the third and second-best options—a truly extraordinary feat.

(5) After the disaster temporarily subsided, the Chinese public strongly resented celebrations of "victory." At least for the people of Wuhan and Hubei, the conclusion of the first phase of the epidemic response was merely a "bitter victory." While observers might intellectually conclude "victory," those who endured and witnessed the disaster felt the "bitterness" more acutely in their hearts and lungs.

Within the first fortnight of the lockdown, Wuhan witnessed

humanitarian tragedies rarely seen in peacetime: multiple citizen videos documented patients collapsing and dying on streets or hospital corridors. Countless families were infected, some suffering the tragedy of entire households wiped out. Director Chang Kai, whose family of four succumbed to the disease, left a heart-wrenching suicide note lamenting the "impossibility of finding a hospital bed"—words dripping with blood. Funeral homes were overwhelmed with bodies, forcing authorities to mobilize cremation teams from multiple provinces to assist.

This is a sudden emergency as severe as war—this is real, not a movie. Under immense pressure, Wuhan Mayor Zhou Xianwang naturally made several mistakes. In my view, the initial adoption of the "home quarantine" approach, based on expert advice, reflected a lack of crisis management experience and information reserves—a matter of capability, not morality. The decision to suspend all public buses to prevent further infections left patients without transportation to seek medical care. Those requiring kidney dialysis, suffering from acute hepatitis, or with heart conditions were unable to access emergency treatment, hospital visits, or medication refills for an extended period afterward, potentially leading to numerous preventable deaths. This constitutes an excessively rigid policy deviation. Moreover, despite extensive online coverage of this issue, the government failed to make timely and effective adjustments—this severe breakdown in core information feedback mechanisms directly exposes the arbitrary arrogance and lack of accountability inherent in an authoritarian regime devoid of oversight. Wuhan's principal officials, including Zhou Xianwang, should feel profound guilt over this!!! The third major error was the acute shortage of basic medical supplies, such as masks and protective gear, at the onset of the lockdown, leading to widespread infections among doctors, nurses, and patients. Hospital bed expansion proceeded at a snail's pace, leaving countless patients unable to secure admission. This resulted in a wave of sudden deaths among critically ill and emergency patients. This crisis was directly linked to the severe inadequacy of emergency reserves and the profoundly inadequate emergency response by both the Hubei provincial government and the central government. However, as the commander of Wuhan's epidemic control headquarters, Zhou Xianwang bears undeniable major responsibility for the failure to implement urgent remedial measures,

for the chaotic and incompetent actions of officials at all levels, and for the humanitarian tragedy that unfolded across Wuhan during the first half of the month.

"Whether they know my guilt or not, only the Spring and Autumn Annals will judge!" Zhou Xianwang was one of the principal figures in this major crisis. The nationwide torrent of criticism directed at him contains elements of unfairness, but also elements of justified criticism. Yet impartial historians cannot demand perfection; for those with conscience, the weight of guilt itself is often the harshest punishment. Weighing the merits of his four major contributions against the demerits, Zhou Xianwang still deserves the top spot on this national anti-epidemic celebrity ranking. Had someone else been in his position, it seems unlikely they could have achieved such a series of progressive, effective adjustments and the high level of execution efficiency he demonstrated at critical junctures.

The newly appointed Wuhan Party Secretary, Wang Zhonglin, has demonstrated his credentials as a seasoned management expert through professional measures such as rapid group management and intensified resource allocation. We must not diminish his achievements merely because his "gratitude theory" drew justified criticism from netizens. Chen Yixin, Deputy Head of the Central Guidance Group, worked tirelessly in Hubei for 50 days and likely developed a genuine affection for Wuhan. While the specifics of his substantive contributions remain unclear, his post-return remarks in Beijing emphasized "modernizing municipal governance" over empty rhetoric. This suggests Wuhan's blood-stained pandemic battle has cleansed his soul, with seeds of virtue now sprouting within him. Of course, the thinking of Wang Zhonglin, Chen Yixin, and others still faces the arduous test of transitioning from Legalism to Confucianism (let alone the path toward constitutional democracy!).

2. What is the political essence of Zhou Xianwang's pandemic response narrative?

First, decentralization granted local authorities limited decision-making autonomy. In recent years, the emerging "unlimited centralization system" has sought to consolidate all power at the center, severely reversing four decades of central-local and policy implementation decentralization. This has left secondary and tertiary administrative levels shackled, rendering them

increasingly incapable of managing critical affairs. Only when a crisis emerged did the "infinite centralization system" prove fundamentally incapable of resolving it, did the State Council gain the opportunity to delegate authority through "territorial responsibility"—a mechanism rooted in the principle of central-local separation of powers. This empowered local governments to take the lead in managing critical pandemic response tasks ("lockdown" required final central approval, while "admitting all patients requiring hospitalization" appeared initially decided independently by local authorities before being expanded by the central government). It was this delegation that enabled Mayor Zhou Xianwang to make independent decisions in a moment of crisis; otherwise, all would have remained mere rhetoric. Thus, the Wuhan municipal government's critically important third choice and suboptimal decisions resulted from decentralization, not centralization.

Second, under nationwide pressure, a localized accountability-driven governance emerged, forming the primary political ecosystem during this major crisis. In recent years, the Legalist faction attempted to foster administrative efficiency within the bureaucracy through harsh laws and severe punishments. In reality, however, they encountered passive resistance everywhere. So-called "lazy governance and administrative negligence" did not diminish; rather, they increased. However, the early chaos in hospitals and heavy civilian casualties during this major crisis ignited nationwide outrage. The intense public pressure generated by an explosion of online information, coupled with the secondary pressure from the Legalist faction's eagerness to shift blame, paradoxically fostered localized accountability politics during the crisis. This accountability politics fundamentally reflects a balance between popular sovereignty and the service-oriented governance of officials. At the macro level, it can also be seen as a balance between social power and political power—a major form of broad political separation of powers. In authoritarian China, only during major crises do citizens gain both the opportunity and intense motivation to break through constraints, forming a powerful collective force demanding accountability from the government. The intermediary through which hundreds of millions of citizens channeled pressure and exercised sovereign oversight to intervene in government was the extremely limited, even intermittent, wave of free

speech propelled by platforms like Weibo, WeChat, various online networks, and print media.It can be argued that it is precisely this limited freedom of speech, struggled for by hundreds of millions during crises, that constitutes the root of partial accountability politics—not the so-called Legalist approach of harsh laws and severe punishments that supposedly forced high administrative efficiency.

Third, Zhou Xianwang's adoption of expert opinions actually falls within the realm of deliberation and decision-making in the policy process, not yet reaching the level of legalized expert separation of powers seen in independent expert committees. The greater political significance of Zhou Xianwang accepting operational suggestions from experts and independent thinkers lies in integrating his personal mindset into the broader environment of free speech and information flow, opening himself to diverse voices, and continuously drawing multidimensional insights from them. Freedom of speech, as a fundamental right, primarily holds moral value, while freedom of information primarily holds operational value. Full freedom of speech often facilitates the free flow of information, providing management and practical affairs with diverse, multidimensional information, value reversals, and resources for original exploration—precisely reflecting the "productivity" of free speech. In contrast, the Legalist approach of one-voice rule and ideological uniformity cannot achieve this genuinely effective, problem-solving "productivity." Thus, the self-enclosed Legalist mindset inevitably "fools the people" and then "fools itself." When faced with major crises, their minds turn to mush—a fundamental flaw that is nearly impossible to alter.

Fourth, Zhou Xianwang's repeated acts of defiance reflect the righteous self-preservation of an upright man who refuses to take the fall. Yet behind his innate courage and indomitable spirit lies the most noble consciousness of natural sovereignty. In totalitarian societies, especially within the vortex of power, this consciousness of natural sovereignty may only burst forth when one is pushed to the brink. Zhou Xianwang's bold decision to proactively leverage CCTV to reveal core truths from an extremely passive position relates to the growing resistance among officials from humble backgrounds and pragmatic professionals against unfair personnel practices in recent years. It also likely stems from the intangible atmosphere of

freedom and enlightenment within the country. This natural sovereignty consciousness, which seeks autonomy over one's destiny, manifests in Zhou Xianwang as a "refusal to take the fall" and, among the masses during times of crisis, as a fierce will to resist. The essence of both is consistent. Therefore, Zhou Xianwang's repeated acts of speaking out against injustice should be seen as part of this year's nationwide, life-or-death resistance. Its demonstrative effect has found echoes in Ma Xiaowei and has also been displayed to some extent by Gao Fu and Jiang Chaoliang. These dissenting voices from the bureaucracy constitute one pole of the diverse discourse emerging from nationwide free speech during this major crisis. Of course, the current expressions of these individuals from humble backgrounds and pragmatic professionals remain limited to personal self-preservation and have not yet reached the level of public moral responsibility; they should not be overestimated. However, the reasonable self-preservation and unyielding resistance of upright individuals often mark the beginning of assuming public moral responsibility.

May 14, 2020

COVID-19 Response Celebrity Rankings (Part Two)

China's COVID-19 Response Phase One Celebrity Rankings

Second Place: Li Wenliang, Doctor at Wuhan Central Hospital

1. Was Li Wenliang a "whistleblower"? Was he a "hero"? Was he a "hero of resistance"?

These questions form the cloud of ambiguity surrounding Li Wenliang. Many state media outlets and "wolf warrior" diplomats have exploited this confusion to undermine Li Wenliang's moral standing and elevate their own non-moral, non-public agendas. Therefore, these questions must first be clarified based on core factual evidence and common sense reasoning. As Confucius said: "We must set names right!"

(1) Li Wenliang and seven other doctors were whistleblowers, while Zhang Jixian was not.

A "whistleblower" refers to an informant, exposer of corruption, or revealer of malpractice—typically someone who discloses highly sensitive

or deliberately concealed information within an organization to the public for the benefit of others and the common good. Dr. Zhang Jixian of Hubei Hospital of Integrated Traditional Chinese and Western Medicine was the first to identify four cases of abnormal pneumonia during patient consultations. Through her persistence, these cases were formally reported to the Jianghan District Center for Disease Control and Prevention on December 29, 2019. Dr. Zhang acted with great responsibility and deserves respect, but her actions were not primarily focused on "alerting society." Therefore, strictly speaking, she is not a "whistleblower."

On December 30, Dr. Ai Fen, Director of the Emergency Department at Wuhan Central Hospital, photographed a patient's positive test report for "SARS coronavirus" and sent it to a fellow doctor and a WeChat group for medical professionals. The core information that Li Wenliang and seven other doctors forwarded, spreading it within medical circles in Wuhan and across the country, originated from this source. In his WeChat messages, Li Wenliang stated: "Seven SARS cases confirmed at the South China Seafood Market," "Isolated in the emergency department at our hospital's Houhu campus," and "Latest update: Coronavirus infection confirmed, currently undergoing viral typing." He later clarified his intent and restraint: "Please keep this confidential and advise family members to take precautions."

Li Wenliang and his colleagues were well aware that infectious disease information is highly sensitive in the Chinese context. Yet, driven by their conscience, they instinctively overrode this sensitivity to protect their colleagues and loved ones. Some have dismissed the public nature of their actions, arguing that the eight doctors failed to disclose the information to society at large. However, the immediate community itself constitutes a form of public sphere. Constrained by societal pressure and the entrenched norm of "avoiding panic," the doctors were unlikely to rashly disclose sensitive information entirely. Caught between societal constraints and their conscience, they chose to issue a warning only to their immediate community. This act of compassion and kindness toward those close at hand felt more natural and tangible than protecting distant, unfamiliar others. Their intent to benefit the public and their willingness to breach sensitive boundaries embody the two defining characteristics of a whistleblower. Thus, these eight doctors are whistleblowers in the most fundamental sense.

(2) Li Wenliang's journey of overcoming fear and his courage in breaking through two taboos prove he was a standard hero, a standard hero of resistance.

On December 31, Li Wenliang and others were summoned by their hospital for questioning. On January 2, CCTV News repeatedly broadcast the report "Eight Rumor Spreaders Investigated for Wuhan Pneumonia of Unknown Cause." Under this pressure from the state apparatus, on the afternoon of January 3, Wuhan police turned the "summons" from virtual to real, taking statements and issuing warnings to Li Wenliang and several others. This caused them significant terror and psychological pressure. Li Wenliang, who had studied all the way to a medical doctorate, had never dealt with the police before. Fearing he couldn't leave without signing the warning, he signed the now-famous "I understand..." statement. Later, fearing potential disciplinary action from his hospital that could jeopardize his career advancement, he reached out to a journalist through a classmate and directly recounted the truth of the situation, indicating that Li Wenliang's spirit of resistance began to take root immediately after facing police admonishment. Though more scholarly than others, he possessed a fiercer resolve.

After Wuhan's lockdown on January 23rd, chaos erupted and deaths mounted, igniting public fury over the government's information blockade and suppression of whistleblowers that had allowed the outbreak to spiral out of control. This surge of public sentiment gradually freed the kind-hearted Li Wenliang from his fear, prompting him to seek media support for his cause. His first step was a cautious, anonymous interview with Beijing Youth Daily's "Deep Dive" column. The massive online reaction to that admonishment letter, which concealed his name, pushed him to step forward further. Beginning January 30th, while lying in his hospital bed, Li Wenliang gave interviews under his real name to media outlets including Caixin, The Beijing News, Ice Point Weekly, and Southern Metropolis Daily. Through these interactions, we witnessed the arduous journey of an ordinary, kind-hearted doctor, who found courage through engagement with public opinion.

In China, particularly within the public institution system, exposing official scandals or illegal suppression often means bearing the costs of stalled advancement, lifelong marginalization, or even more severe

consequences. Few are willing to shoulder such an immense sacrifice. We should not evaluate Li Wenliang by the "absolute courage" of those who have already fallen to a point where they have almost nothing left to lose. Perhaps a more appropriate perspective is this: Li Wenliang's "incremental courage" certainly surpassed the ordinary, and his courage was a threshold-breaking starting point, making it especially precious. Consider decades of Chinese society: how many disasters, scandals, and injustices have emerged? How many individuals within the system or public institutions dared to cross the threshold and speak out with such bravery as Li Wenliang? Even among the many freedom advocates facing this national crisis, few could muster such an "incremental courage"!

After breaching the first taboo—publicly exposing the truth under his real name in domestic media—Li Wenliang swiftly crossed a second forbidden line: the well-known "stability maintenance taboo" by granting interviews to foreign media outlets like The New York Times and CNN. As a public servant, and especially as a Communist Party member, the immense risks involved were self-evident. Throughout these interviews, he consistently advocated for freedom of speech and information and made direct appeals for public morality. His state of mind had evolved beyond fear, endurance, and mediocrity into one of moral responsibility. The common-sense definition of a hero is "one who fights for justice with exceptional courage." The facts above sufficiently prove that Li Wenliang was a standard hero and a standard hero of resistance. The noble title of "hero" fits Li Wenliang perfectly.

(3) Li Wenliang was not an ally of the ultra-left, but a new generation moderate rightist.

Certain rigid ultra-leftists claim that since Li Wenliang was a Communist Party member and reposted a "I support Hong Kong police" Weibo, he was not an awakened individual but "one of us." Yet this sophistry lacks any factual basis.

Wasn't Li Wenliang a freedom-oriented, awakened soul? His courageous act of publicly sharing his reprimand notice became irrefutable evidence that ignited nationwide outrage against the suppression of free speech. His signature line—"I understand..."—has since become a classic testament to the Chinese people's suffering under oppressive tyranny. In

interviews, Li Wenliang emphasized that "truth is more important than rehabilitation"—the very essence and core principle of free speech. He also stated, "I believe a healthy society shouldn't have only one voice." This explicit advocacy for diverse voices embodies the core tenets of liberty, reflecting his fundamental stance and marking the intellectual height he had attained. Li Wenliang may have held reservations about the Hong Kong "radical faction's" approach or been misled by one-sided information, but his public support for Hong Kong police does not equate to opposition to Hong Kong's direct democratic elections!!!

Countless experiences show us that many who initially adopt radical right-wing stances often lack the will to engage in real-world struggle, breakthroughs, and action (though their diverse opinions remain valuable), precisely because they lack the passion for life. Most awakened advocates of freedom and active citizens emerge from the ranks of patriotic, conservative, moderate, and restrained individuals like Li Wenliang, Ai Fen, and Fang Fang—those who originate within the system and public institutions, harboring a sense of participation and natural sovereignty. They begin modestly as ordinary citizens or even system insiders, yet often demonstrate enduring resilience. Precisely because of their ordinary or institutional identities and seemingly moderate traits, they command broad social acceptance, resonate with most ordinary people—including those within the system—and wield powerful, exemplary influence.

2. What was Li Wenliang's substantive contribution to the epidemic response?

First, Li Wenliang's advocacy for free speech objectively facilitated the free flow of information about the epidemic. Journalist Wang Qing articulated this better than I could: "Li Wenliang was the trailblazer for doctors speaking out to the public. Over these days, the most core factual reporting and the most informative interviews have largely come from frontline doctors. In the absence of official information, they have helped the public understand the full picture and details of epidemic prevention. Such interaction became possible largely because Li Wenliang loosened that first screw, creating a relatively friendly environment for doctors to speak out. This allowed medical professionals to dare to tell the truth without fear." As a result, frontline healthcare workers could pool their collective wisdom and

strength with greater freedom of expression.

Li Wenliang pursued pure freedom of speech. Few individuals have, like him, propelled China's wave of demands for free speech and the emergence of localized accountability through personal courage and tragic fate. A historic breakthrough occurred the night Li Wenliang passed away. Countless politically awakened citizens will not retreat to their former positions. The attempts by rigid ultra-left forces to reclaim lost ground will ultimately prove futile.

Li Wenliang's private life was rich in small, heartfelt touches. His heart remained pure and untainted; even after sudden fame, his speech stayed simple and genuine. He cherished poetry and romance, once humorously writing on WeChat: "I'm off to save the Earth!" This revealed his inner dream of heroism and his fiery passion for life. His character showed moments of hesitation and vulnerability, yet also displayed strength and escalating resistance in response to natural indignation. Thus, he was not only a moral hero but also a tragic hero in the aesthetic sense—figures overly rigid and cold, lacking the oscillation between strength and vulnerability, lack tragic aesthetic significance.

The tearful tribute by Hong Bing, head of the People's Daily Shanghai Bureau, went viral on WeChat: "We are furious that your warnings were dismissed as rumors, and we are heartbroken that your death was no rumor..."Millions across the nation spontaneously shed tears for a fellow citizen—a rare social phenomenon revealing that this generation of Chinese has developed a kind of "mass empathy." The tragic fate of ordinary citizen Li Wenliang struck the "tear point" of the vast majority of ordinary people. Most could see themselves or their loved ones reflected in Li Wenliang, finding in their tears, grief, and anger, the public can share a common bond of blood and tears, a shared cultural identity, and a shared vulnerability and compassion. This "great empathy" powerfully shapes our public space and elevates the sanctity of our collective emotions. The Chinese people place special importance on interpersonal bonds and loyalty. History is our eternal court of judgment, and loyalty is our religion in this life.

In Li Wenliang's life story, many Chinese people tangibly experienced a profoundly distant lament or tragic beauty. His Weibo account has become a "Chinese Wailing Wall," a confidant for the vast majority of ordinary

people. This carries multiple layers of profound, indescribable meaning, holding infinite suspense and boundless potential.

Li Wenliang's moral fortitude and tragic fate have elevated him beyond being merely a symbol of China's struggle for free speech. He has become a paragon of how an ordinary Chinese citizen awakens under oppression and fights back with every ounce of his life's passion. Truly, he deserves this symbolism and exemplary status. All attempts to distort his legacy for the sake of orthodox ideology are futile. Time will ultimately prove that he belongs not to power, but to justice forever.

China's COVID-19 Response: First-Phase Celebrity Ranking

Third Place: Zhang Xiaochun, Medical Imaging Specialist at Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University

1. When family cluster infections were spiraling out of control after Wuhan's lockdown, it was Zhang Xiaochun, a medical imaging expert at Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University, who promptly proposed the core solution: admitting all suspected patients based on positive CT scans and implementing categorized isolation. However, the process of Professor Zhang sharing his emergency treatment plan on WeChat Moments revealed the immense difficulty of overcoming fear and breaking through information blockades. While his recommendations appeared to be swiftly adopted, their "full" implementation ultimately relied on the momentum of a wave of free speech.

(1) Zhang Xiaoqun faced immense pressure and fear when publishing her recommendations on WeChat, and later submitted her resignation three times.

Working on the front lines of Wuhan's pandemic response, Zhang witnessed early chaos and continually reflected on the shortcomings of nucleic acid testing. On February 1, while conducting follow-up calls, she was berated by a patient denied hospitalization despite a negative test result. On February 2, while waiting in line to see her parents' doctor, the utterly despairing gaze of a patient behind her—also denied admission—deeply unsettled her, spurring her to take action. That evening, Zhang resolved to post her emergency recommendations on WeChat Moments. Yet she found herself repeatedly editing and deleting the post, trapped in fear and hesitation. Eight doctors had already faced disciplinary action from the

police for speaking out, and Wuhan authorities had imposed a ban on healthcare workers posting information online without authorization—a "politics first" directive. Violators would be punished, and their supervisors would face collective liability.

After a night of anxious deliberation, she ultimately couldn't bring herself to post it. The next morning, Zhang Xiaochun resolved: To save lives, she would take the risk. Thus emerged that lengthy WeChat post: "Stop relying solely on nucleic acid testing. I strongly recommend CT imaging as the primary diagnostic basis for 2019nCoV pneumonia at this stage. Strongly urge the government to requisition hotels, guesthouses, or student dormitories to accommodate over 100,000 suspected cases and most medical observers for mandatory quarantine and treatment! Family clusters are increasingly common in Wuhan... This is a frontline radiologist's urgent plea! Government must act immediately—epidemic control is a matter of life and death. We cannot allow asymptomatic or nucleic acid-negative CT-positive individuals to remain under home observation!"

This was arguably China's most critical WeChat message of the year, potentially saving thousands of lives.

Zhang Xiaochun took a risk, yet feared censorship. She cried out again: "...I urge everyone to forward this. More importantly, I hope this proposal reaches our leaders so we can optimize current epidemic control procedures and strategies! As a medical professional, I offer these practical measures to block transmission pathways out of professional duty and conscience—not for politics, but for lives!"—The final ten words essentially pleaded with censors not to misinterpret her as undermining "stability," imploring them to show leniency. They reflect the intense pressure, hardship, and helplessness of that time, and reading them today still evokes profound sorrow.

Within ten minutes of posting on WeChat, the anticipated pressure arrived. "A leader called and berated me harshly, saying my remarks could implicate the institution and its leadership, demanding I delete the post immediately." Her feelings were conflicted—she hoped her appeal would spread and be adopted, yet feared endangering her workplace. "So I deliberately hesitated for ten minutes before deleting it. Why? Because I wanted it shared as widely as possible."

This WeChat post, which could have saved thousands of lives, existed

for less than 20 minutes—a stark reflection of the harsh reality in China then and now. Afterward, Zhang Xiaochun submitted her resignation three times. By then, hospital leadership, encouraged by positive public feedback, had firmly supported her.

(2) Is 20 minutes of dissemination sufficient? This is a question in China.

Zhang Xiaochun's urgent proposal quickly went viral online, with numerous professors and experts nationwide expressing agreement and support for her views. The very next day, February 4th, the General Office of the National Health Commission and the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine jointly issued the "Diagnosis and Treatment Protocol for Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia (Trial Version 5)," which included "suspected cases with radiological features of pneumonia" as the clinical diagnosis criteria for Hubei Province. Zhang Xiaochun breathed a sigh of relief.

Zhang Xiaochun possesses a rare blend of operational rationality and crisis management awareness, stemming from her frontline experience in the 2003 SARS outbreak and the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. She emphasized that in major crises, one must not merely raise problems but also draw on experience to offer constructive suggestions. Her urgent proposal not only provided the professional basis for "admitting all who should be admitted"—CT-positive imaging—but also offered a novel and feasible implementation method: isolating "suspected cases" and "clinically diagnosed cases" in single rooms, whereas "confirmed cases" were typically housed in shared wards, with even hundreds of mild patients coexisting in the same space within makeshift hospitals. Single-room isolation prevents cross-infection among non-COVID-19 patients and blocks household and community transmission caused by suspected patients isolating at home. This approach made "breaking the chain of transmission" a realistic possibility.

However, implementing single-room isolation would have objectively required tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of hospital rooms. Urgently preparing them demanded tremendous resolve, yet conventional thinking tends toward hesitation. Not only did officials in Wuhan and Hubei Province hesitate, but the Central Guidance Group also wavered. At the time, they decided to build makeshift hospitals urgently. But this was not the

fundamental solution for implementing single-room isolation.

It wasn't until the sudden death of Li Wenliang in the early hours of February 7 that a tidal wave of online public opinion that the sense of responsibility and conscience of officials at all levels. Independent voices also launched fierce criticism and offered urgent management recommendations. Under immense pressure, Zhou Xianwang and Jiang Chaoliang made a decisive move. This led to the February 9th directive of "admitting all who should be admitted and treating all who should be treated," the large-scale emergency requisitioning of 16 university dormitories and various venues, and the massive expansion of makeshift hospital capacity. Thus, it was precisely the surging tide of free speech that propelled localized accountability-driven governance. This enabled operationally focused recommendations—rooted in information transparency—to gain ultimate acceptance by decision-makers, ultimately catalysing a fundamental turning point in the pandemic response.

For inexplicable reasons, the actual implementation of Wuhan's single-room isolation policy remained underreported. This information blockade misled not only the Chinese people but the entire world, leading everyone to believe that makeshift hospitals alone were playing the dominant role.

2. What does Zhang Xiaochun's pandemic response story reveal?

First, it underscores the critical importance of free speech and the profound, multifaceted impact of Li Wenliang's tragic death on Chinese society. Zhang Xiaochun's exceptional proposal was accepted and implemented not because of institutional advantages like "pooling resources for major undertakings," but through a convergence of collective wisdom and effort: an individual breaking through the information blockade, nationwide pressure building, and decisive action by a key official operating within a decentralized system.

Zhang Xiaochun's stance was apolitical, yet faced with information suppression and high-pressure tactics, she resolutely exercised her public voice, her right to resist, and her right to active participation. As Lin Yutang famously stated, freedom of speech is the right to cry out in pain. Both freedom of speech and the self-defense right to protect one's life are fundamental natural rights of the individual. Especially in critical moments, the right to cry out in pain is, in essence, the right to life itself. Zhang

Xiaochun once told reporters, "Don't be afraid to speak the truth—what matter could be greater than human life?" In critical moments, every minute of hesitation in exposing problems could cost lives. Zhang Xiaochun's decisive breakthrough through partial information blockades stemmed from this moral courage: "I'll risk everything—human lives are at stake." In fact, Zhang Xiaochun's exercise of the right to actively offer advice not only fulfilled her civic right to freedom of speech but also her right to political participation in major affairs. This demonstrates that even as a non-political figure, Zhang possessed a fundamental awareness of natural sovereignty.

Zhang Xiaochun advocated for bold speech and independent thinking, embodying a modern, self-reliant character. Yet her heart was tender—she hesitated to have her nine-year-old daughter undergo a CT scan, only for the child to climb onto the scanner herself, declaring, "Go ahead! It's okay!" She showed such compassion, generosity, and kindness toward her patients, yet possessed remarkable courage in the face of danger. Her profound compassion and courage bear witness to the moral heights achieved by Chinese doctors. Her decisive nature inherently carries an original impact, and her thinking is exploratory and operationally oriented. It is no coincidence that she could propose such outstanding operational suggestions during a major crisis.

It is quite significant that this year, three Wuhan citizens who demonstrated heroic courage and pure, noble character were all outsiders: Li Wenliang came from Liaoning, Zhang Xiaochun from Inner Mongolia, and Fang Fang from Jiangxi.

China's COVID-19 Response: First-Phase Celebrity Ranking

Fourth Place: Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council

1. Frankly, due to information opacity, it's difficult to gauge how China's senior officials performed or demonstrated personal responsibility during the pandemic. However, given the significant and observable contributions of public servants Li Keqiang, Sun Chunlan, and Ma Xiaowei to anti-pandemic efforts, omitting these three pragmatists from any "anti-pandemic celebrity ranking" would be profoundly unfair. Therefore, based on limited media coverage, I will briefly outline the main threads of their pandemic response efforts and provide a concise assessment.

(1) Li Keqiang's early decision to implement "local responsibility"

proved pivotal in the initial phase of containing the outbreak nationwide. This principle, also termed "local management," represents a form of decentralization between central and local authorities, emphasizing autonomous decision-making by regions on major matters. It continues the trend of power devolution since 1980, where central-local division can lead to a degree of semi-autonomy, though rarely fully realized under an authoritarian system. True, comprehensive local autonomy can only emerge within democratic and federal frameworks. Without legal and institutional safeguards, the recent "unlimited centralization" movement has steadily reversed four decades of decentralization by continuously concentrating power upward. Only during this year's major crisis did Li Keqiang gain an opportunity to re-experiment with this "central-local power separation" approach.

During the first nearly 20 days of Wuhan's pandemic response, local officials like Zhou Xianwang and Jiang Chaoliang endured immense hardship and suffering. Under intense nationwide oversight, they successively identified the third option—lockdown—and the second-best option—ensuring all infected individuals were admitted and treated. This fundamentally reversed the critical situation of uncontrolled spread. This fact powerfully demonstrates that Li Keqiang's central-local power-sharing approach is entirely feasible and represents a sophisticated, modern governance philosophy. Yet whether such temporary "decentralization" and "delegation of authority" can be sustained after returning to normal remains uncertain.

(2) After Zhou Xianwang and Jiang Chaoliang devised the operational strategy of "admitting and treating all patients," Li Keqiang, as head of the Central Epidemic Response Leadership Group and Premier of the State Council, resolutely endorsed it. Even before this, Li had independently decided to draw on the post-Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction model. Nineteen provinces dispatched large medical teams to provide targeted support to Hubei, adopting either a "one province supporting one city" or "two provinces supporting one city" approach. Supporting provinces established command centers on the front lines, with medical teams operating under the principle of "local management," accepting unified arrangements from local health departments and hospitals. From midnight to

midnight on February 9 alone, Wuhan Tianhe Airport received over 40 flights carrying more than 5,000 medical personnel—an unprecedented effort. Within a few dozen days, a total of 43,000 medical workers arrived in Hubei to provide support. This approach of dividing responsibilities by region and implementing local management proved highly successful in crisis management. Premier Li Keqiang demonstrated strong leadership in establishing this large-scale framework.

(3) By March, the epidemic in Wuhan had largely stabilized, and most regions nationwide transitioned to low-risk status. However, a new challenge emerged: asymptomatic infections. Li Keqiang upheld his consistent stance of "seeking truth from facts, ensuring open and transparent information disclosure, and prohibiting underreporting." On March 30, he further mandated that starting April 1, the actual situation regarding asymptomatic infections must be officially disclosed. According to the National Health Commission, as of 24:00 on March 31, there were 1,367 asymptomatic cases still under medical observation nationwide. The high starting point of over a thousand cases upon disclosure underscored the severity of previous concealment. Transparency gradually eased nationwide panic over asymptomatic infections, demonstrating that transparency serves as the most effective social-psychological regulator.

(4) After domestic nucleic acid test kit production capacity significantly increased, Premier Li Keqiang made another decisive decision on April 22 to promote large-scale nucleic acid and antibody testing. Wuhan recently launched a "Ten-Day Campaign" to provide free testing for all 8 million residents who had not yet been tested (partially covered by social insurance, with non-local residents paying 280 yuan per person). This strategy of "testing all who should be tested and testing all who wish to be tested," along with its concrete implementation, was entirely correct. "Universal testing" is the fundamental solution to restoring normal life for Wuhan's citizens, and "universal free testing" is essential to prevent any omissions.

At these critical junctures, Li Keqiang's decision-making and crisis management proved highly effective. This year marks the most accomplished year of Li Keqiang's seven-to-eight-year tenure as Premier. This popular leader, known for his moderate governance style, has indeed

played an indispensable role in temporarily containing the fierce COVID-19 outbreak during the nation's initial phase.

2. What is the substantive core of Li Keqiang's achievements in combating the pandemic? Where do its shortcomings lie?

The core lies in the effective integration of centralization and decentralization. At China's current stage, "unlimited centralization" has not been fully realized. The decentralization approach temporarily promoted by Li Keqiang enabled local governments and departments to make autonomous decisions during the crisis, thereby achieving a certain level of administrative efficiency. This year's pandemic response featured appropriate decentralization between central and local authorities, between political decision-making and operational management, and between administrative officials and experts. Premier Li, positioned at the intersection of decentralization and centralization, succeeded primarily because his approach was fundamentally sound. Decentralization best empowers frontline managers to make timely, localized decisions, whereas excessive centralization inevitably leads to inefficiency and exacerbates crises. During major crises, after decentralization promotes autonomous decision-making by localities and departments, moderate centralization is still needed to pool and allocate super-resources, compensating for the massive resource gaps localities face in responding to emergencies like pandemics. Dogmatic laissez-faire advocates mistakenly equate political decentralization with neglect or complete non-centralization—a polarized mindset that causes immense harm. Historical evidence demonstrates that both Britain during WWII and the United States during the Apollo moon landing program employed a framework of decentralization with measured centralization—a balanced integration of both approaches—achieving exceptional administrative efficiency without undermining liberal democratic systems.

In this year's emergency pandemic response, Premier Li Keqiang inevitably made various mistakes. His most significant error, however, lies in the severe delay in advancing investigations into the virus's origins. Simultaneously, he has failed to rein in the "wolf warrior" diplomats within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—a department under the State Council—who flagrantly violate their fundamental duties to promote peace and bridge differences. Instead, these diplomats actively provoke conflicts and bring

calamity upon the nation through their foolish actions. As a core component of the "Second Boxer Movement," these "wolf warrior" diplomats have utterly ignored the grim reality that collective psychology in Europe and America has undergone profound shifts following a massive loss of life. They demonstrate complete ignorance that passion remains a primary driver of significant human action, and their relentless use of crude lies proves they have lost all sense of basic reality. While this matter may not rest solely with Li Keqiang, he is nonetheless responsible.

China, as a nation of 1.4 billion people and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, bears immense moral responsibility for the health and safety of the world's seven billion people and their interconnected well-being. Regarding the virus's origin, scientist Zhang Wenhong stated in a February 28 interview: "Wuhan was the first city in China where this new infectious disease emerged. If it had been transmitted from abroad, multiple cities would have reported simultaneous outbreaks, not sequential cases." This represents a remarkably straightforward common-sense assessment and logical deduction. Moreover, if such a virulent infectious disease had first emerged in any other country, it would have triggered widespread transmission and major outbreaks long before reappearing in Wuhan late last year. This is another straightforward common-sense conclusion. If respecting common sense and rationality alone is insufficient, consider scientific rationality: if the virus truly originated elsewhere, it would be easy to find definitive evidence of its chronological sequence on the viral phylogenetic tree. In early May, the prestigious journal Nature published an experimental paper by researchers from South China Agricultural University, Guangzhou Zoo, and other institutions. Their study revealed that a coronavirus isolated from Malayan pangolins shared amino acid sequence similarities of up to 100% with SARS-CoV-2 in several genes. Genomic comparative analysis suggests the novel coronavirus likely emerged from a recombination between pangolin coronaviruses and a bat coronavirus strain, with pangolins potentially serving as the intermediate host. The mystery is now largely unraveled. Acknowledging this fact aligns most closely with the moral standing and fundamental interests of the Chinese nation.

I believe that as Premier of the State Council, Mr. Li Keqiang should vigorously promote a combination of relevant laws and policies to help a

minority of Chinese people completely abandon the habit of consuming wild animals (it is said that Southeast Asian populations also have a taste for wild animal consumption, but they are fortunate not to possess China's technological capabilities and national strength for large-scale bat research). Following the National People's Congress's legislation to completely shut down wildlife markets, he should further push for the enactment of an Urban Animal Husbandry Law. This legislation should establish high legal barriers for residents of cramped apartment buildings in large and medium-sized cities who keep cats and dogs, animals highly susceptible to disease transmission (suspicion surrounds domestic cats in the Wuhan outbreak). Legislation or amendments should also be enacted to promptly relocate all bat research projects to remote mountainous forests. The actions of a tiny minority of scientific fanatics—who disregard the health and safety of their fellow Chinese citizens and all humanity in pursuit of personal glory and potentially enormous financial gain—must be severely punished and stopped by law. The Chinese nation must not be made to pay for its unconscionable pursuit of fame and profit. Regarding disaster relief, China should immediately provide 3,000 yuan in living subsidies to each of its 80 million impoverished citizens. It should also launch large-scale emergency aid for pandemic response in the US, UK, India, Russia, African nations, and Latin America. Simultaneously, China should allocate 20 billion yuan to purchase relief grain from the US and other sources to assist African populations facing the risk of famine. Humanitarianism must become the paramount consideration in China's foreign policy. The ability to vigorously advance these humanitarian initiatives will serve as a major test of whether China's leaders possess a global vision and the resolve to transcend conventional thinking.

China's COVID-19 Response: First-Phase Leadership Ranking

Fifth Place: Sun Chunlan, Vice Premier of the State Council; Ma Xiaowei, Director of the National Health Commission

1. Sun Chunlan and Ma Xiaowei are ranked jointly because it is difficult to attribute certain key contributions to either individual. Moreover, given Vice Premier Sun's oversight of education, culture, and health sectors, their work involved highly coordinated collaboration. Currently, no publicly

available reports exist to distinguish their independent achievements.

(1) One of Vice Premier Sun Chunlan's most notable achievements was spearheading the construction of makeshift hospitals. Following urgent recommendations from Professor Yu Fasheng and Academician Wang Chen, she led the decision to build these facilities, demonstrating both decisive leadership and an open-minded approach to expert counsel.

Ma Xiaowei stated at a press conference: "Since the outbreak began, the number of patients seeking medical care has surged dramatically, exceeding the capacity of regular hospitals. As head of the Central Guidance Group and Vice Premier of the State Council, Sun Chunlan conducted on-site inspections and decisively ordered the construction of makeshift hospitals, directing Wuhan to immediately convert a number of sports venues and convention centers into makeshift hospitals."Mayor Zhou Xianwang and others swiftly established 16 makeshift hospitals. These facilities played a vital and irreplaceable role in both prevention and treatment, creating a new model for rapidly expanding medical resources in future responses to public health emergencies and major disasters. Sun Chunlan deserves primary credit for this achievement.

(2) The fact that none of the 42,000 medical personnel (latest figure: 43,000) dispatched nationwide to aid Hubei contracted the virus is indeed a monumental achievement. This was achieved through the strict implementation of hospital infection control measures under the supervision of the National Health Commission. Reports indicate that participating doctors and nurses wore double-layered protective suits, four layers of gloves, double masks, and goggles during their shifts. Moreover, the National Health Commission proactively deployed medical teams to serve as rotational reinforcements and for recuperation. The value of "not a single infection among the 42,000 medical personnel dispatched nationwide to aid Hubei" lies first and foremost in safeguarding the lives of frontline medical workers—the foremost hope of their families and the entire nation. This achievement is truly monumental, and no amount of praise would be excessive. Ma Xiaowei deserves immense credit for this. Moreover, it fundamentally reverses the collectivist value of "at all costs," embodying a new humanitarian philosophy that places greater respect on life and refuses to sacrifice others lightly.

(3) The National Health Commission and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology demonstrated exceptional organizational coordination in urgently arranging the production of medical supplies.

Some observers focus solely on China's formidable industrial capacity as the foundational pillar of its pandemic response, overlooking the equally critical role of efficient organizational coordination. During the early crisis phase, Wuhan faced unprecedented shortages of medical supplies amid chaotic conditions. Under nationwide pressure, the MIIT and other ministries urgently mobilized relevant enterprises to pivot production toward medical protective suits under unified coordination. Officials were even stationed directly at factories to resolve issues in real time. Take mask production as a single example: under the State Council's principle of "appropriate separation of political decision-making and administrative management," relevant departments demonstrated remarkably efficient oversight. "Masks were a major challenge. Following central directives, relevant ministries established a 'mask task force' dedicated to coordinating nationwide production. This work was both monumental and meticulous. Often, securing a single batch of several thousand N95 masks required staff to coordinate for half a day or even an entire day." By late January, China's daily mask production stood at 8 million units. By late February, it had surged to 116 million. By late March, output reached 300 to 400 million units. This 'mask task force' model holds significant potential for adaptation across numerous crisis management initiatives.

When dispatching medical teams to support Hubei, the National Health Commission also pioneered a "precision management" model for non-manufacturing sectors. For instance, medical teams were categorized based on the distinct treatment requirements of mild and severe cases: Critical care teams were assembled by prioritizing respiratory, infectious disease, and critical care specialists, forming fully integrated units. In contrast, general and mild-case teams—such as those deployed to makeshift hospitals—were primarily composed of internal medicine doctors and nurses, each maintaining a fixed ratio. In critical care hospitals, the National Health Commission also formed joint expert teams to conduct unified assessments and management of all severe cases. These outstanding medical experts continuously refined treatment protocols through open, collaborative group

discussions. The Commission effectively promoted public approaches—a model remarkably similar to the open discussion workflows once prevalent in U.S. high-tech companies. Reports indicate that the average medical cost per patient for early-stage hospitalized cases was 17,000 yuan, rising to just 21,500 yuan by April 6. For individual medical expenses, authorities adopted a "treat first, settle later" approach, reportedly making treatment essentially free. This pandemic response also extensively employed integrated Chinese and Western medicine treatments with remarkable results, demonstrating that China's health authorities have moved beyond the long-standing dogmatic rejection of traditional Chinese medicine. Given the highly effective coordination and strategic planning executed by the National Health Commission during the latter stages of the pandemic, we can infer that Ma Xiaowei is not only a pragmatic leader but also an outstanding management expert. Such a Minister of Health would be a standout figure on the global stage.

2. What is the essence of Sun Chunlan and Ma Xiaowei's achievements in combating the epidemic?

According to Ma Xiaowei, Vice Premier Sun Chunlan placed particular emphasis on feedback from hundreds of journalists stationed in Wuhan, responding to or adopting nearly all reasonable suggestions. A March 19 report by Southern Weekly corroborates this account—Sun Chunlan's open working approach demonstrates that the "local accountability politics under public pressure" I mentioned earlier is powerfully embodied in her.Her ability to heed expert advice and decisively approve the construction of makeshift hospitals demonstrates remarkable composure.

A seventy-year-old woman shouldering the nation's weighty responsibilities, working tirelessly on the front lines of a virulent infectious disease for ninety consecutive days—her sense of duty and dedication undoubtedly moved countless citizens. Her unflinching response to residents in a Wuhan neighborhood who shouted "Fake! Fake! It's all fake!" was appropriate—yet days later, she calmly accepted a staged scene in another neighborhood where government officials posing as ordinary residents cheered her on. This reveals her failure to fully shed the habits of officialdom. Moreover, her information channels remain heavily reliant on official journalists, while she remains indifferent to the cries of independent

citizens and grassroots communities.

Both Sun Chunlan and Ma Xiaowei are pragmatic officials with moderate styles and strong management skills, yet neither has demonstrated any distinctive personality. Their edges and temperaments remain largely invisible, likely eroded by years of suppression within the bureaucratic vortex. In this regard, Sun falls short of Zhou Xianwang, who has already begun to exhibit a natural sense of authority. Ma Xiaowei, however, appears to be quietly aligning himself with Zhou Xianwang. His swift acceptance of Gao Fu's advice on the evening of December 30th, dispatching an expert team to Wuhan for investigation the following day, and then "unauthorizedly" convening a secret nationwide teleconference on January 14th to deploy epidemic prevention preparations—all demonstrate his diligence and acuity. To avoid taking the fall, he "secretly" posted news of the January 14 meeting online in mid-to-late February and "secretly" altered its original publication date—demonstrating that he is a wise man who is not lacking in courage. However, in an increasingly decaying totalitarian regime, the prospects for outstanding pragmatists are often not bright.

May 20, 2020

Anti-Epidemic Celebrity Rankings (Part Three)

COVID-19 Response Celebrity Rankings

Sixth Place: Fang Fang, Writer from Wuhan

1. The underlying themes of Fang Fang's Diary are, first, righteous indignation against injustice, and second, a multidimensional "poetic chronicle in the style of Du Fu."

Below is what I personally consider the finest literary depiction of this year's COVID-19 events:

"24-Hour Medical Shift at the Quarantine Site

Just took a hot shower, but I'm drenched in sweat and feel miserable.

Still wearing the same protective suit. We spray over a pound of alcohol on ourselves daily. Tonight I ate not just a boxed meal, but also a bowl of instant noodles—and I'm still damn hungry...

From a political perspective, only one person in our unit meets the COVID-19 diagnostic criteria. But based on the clinical standards

implemented yesterday, one-third of our colleagues...

They all have elderly parents and young children to care for. Please spare them!

I can stay behind. I haven't seen my parents in ages, and I don't have a cat to care for at home. My health is recovering well.

I heard funeral support teams from Chongqing and Henan have departed, but I don't think it's enough.

We should mobilize every monk, Taoist priest, and lama capable of chanting sutras and performing rituals to support Wuhan. After all, there are too many aggrieved souls and wandering ghosts—their wails fill the night sky..."

This WeChat post from mid-February was written by a doctor using the pseudonym "Citizen Xiao Wei/Stainless Steel Castor Bean." The text brims with deep sorrow, yet conceals layers of meaning, vitality, and righteous indignation—every word demands careful consideration.

The author of this finest literary description is not Fang Fang. It's not that writer Fang Fang couldn't write it, but rather that she was not on the front lines of treatment. Moreover, to ensure Fang Fang's Diary could survive and circulate daily within China, she clearly toned down the "intensity" of the brutal facts she relayed between the lines, which inevitably affected the vividness and cutting edge of the literature.

So what is the significance of Fang Fang's diary?

Whether consciously or not, Fang Fang's Diary appears superficially as a loose collection of diary entries. Yet beneath this surface lies profound meaning:

First, it channels righteous indignation. Faced with the sudden loss of countless lives in peacetime, a conscientious citizen passionately condemns those responsible for this catastrophe, demanding truth from the public—this is the natural fury of justice. The primary value and central thread of Fang Fang's Diary lies in its furious articulation of truth—a concentrated barrage of revelations that presents the early humanitarian catastrophe in Wuhan with unflinching realism and dimensionality. It relentlessly demands accountability, condemnation, and justice—this is the spiritual intensity of Fang Fang's Diary.

"Wuhan is now in the midst of a catastrophe. What is catastrophe? ...

Catastrophe is when hospitals used to go through one book of death certificates in several months, but now they burn through one in just a few days; ... Catastrophe is when it's not just one person in your family who dies, but an entire family wiped out within days or half a month; ... These days, death seems to be closing in on us. The neighbor's cousin died. An acquaintance's younger brother died. A friend lost his parents and wife, and then he himself died.People can't even cry enough... Occasionally, an audio clip surfaces—a child somewhere wailing hoarsely: 'Mommy, don't leave me. I love you so much...' Hearing such cries, we mothers always feel a chill run through our bodies....Alas, how many Wuhan families have been shattered in this catastrophe? To date, not a single soul has taken responsibility or offered apology—only endless excuses and deflecting narratives... Classmates who once sang praises of our golden age now declare: 'Only executing those who harmed others can appease public fury!'... Professor Chuan E (of Hubei University) confessed he feels like weeping every day. Who doesn't? That's why I keep telling my friends: having come this far, we can clearly see the weight of human error. After reviewing everything, not a single one of those derelict in duty should be forgiven or spared... As long as we still cling to life, we must seek justice for them. For those who neglected their duties, failed to act, or shirked responsibility, we must pursue accountability layer by layer, leaving not a single one unpunished. Otherwise, how can we face those whose bodies were carried away in body bags? ... Our tears have not yet run dry. Our tears have not yet run dry... The Chinese people disdain repentance, but in the face of so many lives lost, some must be called out to repent: You—yes, you—step forward and repent!

Reading through the diaries, Fang Fang's writing is remarkably restrained. She avoids sensationalizing death or gruesome details, yet her pen powerfully channels the "rage" born of suffering, unleashing a uniquely local brand of "scathing condemnation" that reveals life's indomitable spirit and fierce resilience.Though Fang Fang's Diary often focuses on personal life and mundane details, its form remains cohesive despite its loose structure. A towering fury and extraordinary spirit permeate every page.This intense, righteous, and natural fury represents the most precious spiritual quality in contemporary China, where "political phobia" pervades. It embodies the

eternal righteous spirit of heaven and earth in Chinese tradition, the vast essence of the cosmos—no praise for this natural fury is excessive for any noble life endowed with courage and conscience.In stark contrast stand the many who, like Fang Fang, possess social standing and resources, yet bear the duty to speak out in times of crisis—yet dare not utter even a whisper. These well-meaning, self-restrained souls live in an unnatural, excessive fear. They have lost the capacity for "natural anger." They dare to vehemently condemn the Cultural Revolution of decades past, yet remain silent in the face of mass deaths unfolding before their eyes. How will future history judge this generation?

Anger itself is a natural sovereign flow; anger itself is an aesthetic platform. Anger breeds poets, anger breeds writers, anger breeds poetic history. Through countless details and pulsating moments, Fang Fang's Diary reveals multiple facets of Wuhan residents living at the epicenter of a virulent pandemic during its darkest hours. This social history viewed through personal lenses weaves a three-dimensional tapestry of ordinary urban life, its depths concealing a collective chronicle of a nation's suffering, grief, struggle, and indomitable spirit. In this sense, Fang Fang's Diary bears a striking resemblance to Du Fu's "poetic history." The second central thread of the work lies in how the author's literary prowess subtly constructs a multidimensional "Du Fu-esque poetic history." Du Fu's artistry surpasses Fang Fang's, yet Fang Fang's courage in speaking truth surpasses Du Fu's. Du Fu's candor stemmed from innate kindness and an incomplete censor's mindset, while Fang Fang's arises from a natural sense of sovereignty—liberated within the individual and oriented toward an era of freedom. In Fang Fang's Diary, the twin threads of righteous indignation and the multidimensional "Du Fu poetic history" intertwine, creating an effect akin to the majestic and dynamic sweep of a symphony.

2. What is the substantive significance of Fang Fang's Diary for the pandemic response?

It is "accountability-driven pressure."

"One person becomes an army" is often merely self-promotion for many, but one remarkable woman has achieved it: 65-year-old writer Fang Fang.

"Fang Fang: Diary Entry 2.27 — Such a catastrophe cannot possibly be

resolved by mere dismissals or demotions. For the people of Wuhan, not a single mastermind or accomplice will be spared! The souls of over two thousand (and countless more unrecorded) victims of homicide, their families, the medical staff who fought day and night to save lives, the nine million Wuhan residents enduring hardship, and the five million displaced souls unable to return home—all demand answers and justice. For now, we wait. First, we wait for the city to open. Then, we wait for answers."

Throughout Fang Fang's Diary, passages like this one relentlessly seize upon the theme of accountability, delivering powerful condemnation and stern warnings. Against the backdrop of public outrage at the time, such words were enough to make certain perpetrators of catastrophic harm tremble in fear. How feasible is "accountability" in reality? This remains uncertain. Yet Fang Fang's Diary and the fury of its millions of readers exert tangible public pressure on those responsible for the catastrophe, leaving boundless room for imagination. Politically, this represents the sovereign populace exerting counter-pressure on the bureaucratic establishment. At this juncture, Fang Fang herself has emerged as an independent center of pressure. At that critical moment, Fang Fang—waving the banner of humanity and implementing "accountability-driven pressure"—could be seen, in a sense, as the moral spokesperson for Hubei's sixty million residents.

"Accountability-driven pressure" represents the cutting edge of free speech. Through this approach, Fang Fang's Diary cultivated a pressure group comprising a vast readership, playing a pivotal role in fostering the aforementioned "local accountability politics under free speech." In this regard, writer Er Xiang, along with Editor-in-Chief Hu Shuli and Caixin Media, who provided a robust domestic platform, also deserve significant credit.

The distinctive "accountability-driven pressure" of Fang Fang's Diary also lies in its ability to subtly influence readers through literary form and impact. Does this contradict artistic aesthetics? It is precisely one of literature's highest achievements. The independent aesthetic value of Fang Fang's Diary lies not in its Bai Juyi-style social utility, but in the righteous indignation and heroic spirit it reveals through that utility. This is an aesthetic unique to female heroes. Through the symphonic outbursts of natural anger

and warning cries in each segment, one can glimpse Fang Fang's pure heart and the beauty of her indomitable character. For writers, "literature for literature's sake" smacks of craftsmanship and an overly ivory-towered perspective. "Literature for life's sake" is where literature truly belongs. Life is inherently natural and whole. Before becoming a competent writer, one must first be a sovereign citizen free from servility and moral atrophy.

After the battle against the epidemic, the reconstruction of narratives begins. The siege against the outspoken Fang Fang during the "Second Boxer Movement" is now widely known. As Fang Fang herself stated, "China's ultra-leftists are essentially a scourge that brings disaster upon the nation and its people." Amidst the assaults and collective punishment, fear once again permeates the air. Fang Fang's attempts to clear her name and explain herself have become increasingly defensive, as if she has lost some of her former spirit. Even heroines have moments of vulnerability, and it is precisely such moments that qualify them for entry into the higher temple of art: the aesthetics of tragedy. A conclusion marked by despondency, even tears, rings truer and carries deeper resonance than a high-pitched outcry.

In a "Letter from Beijing" published by France's Le Monde, Fang Fang was likened to Antigone, the tragic heroine of ancient Greek tragedy. Antigone—a sacred name—was executed by her city-state's ignorant populace for defying the law by burying her brother, who fought on the enemy side. Her artistic image has become a moral symbol in Western civilization, defending the bonds of kinship and the fundamental principles of humanity. Fang Fang's fate bears striking parallels. In seeking justice for the countless Wuhan fathers and brothers who died unjustly, and in defending the right to life and humanitarian ethics against such injustice, she now faces the unfettered slander and attacks of a second generation of Boxers. Fang Fang, shielding herself from assaults on all sides, possesses the quintessential tragic heroine's spirit. She is China's modern-day Antigone, destined to be celebrated by future generations.

Living with natural compassion, natural integrity, and natural justice is one of life's primary meanings. Yet this is a grain of sand intolerable to the servile Boxers, who are now stirring up a tidal wave of lies. They seek to bury the blood-soaked truths of Wuhan's early pandemic days—revealed through Fang Fang's diary and the immediate accounts of countless doctors,

nurses, citizens, and victims—under a deluge of online falsehoods. Yet the innate conscience of countless compatriots remains unclouded. One reader left this message: "Thank you, Fang Fang, for documenting all this. Those who lost loved ones in the eye of the storm, confronting the virus head-on, send their regards to you!"

Fang Fang remains steadfast. What she stands for is not merely her own cause, but a line drawn by an entire generation.

Anti-Epidemic Celebrity Rankings

Seventh Place: Yu Fasheng, Professor at Central China Normal University

1. The proposal for "fully enclosed" medical treatment centers was a masterpiece by an expert.

As Director of the Emergency Management Research Center at Central China Normal University and a provincial/municipal emergency management expert advisor, Professor Yu Fasheng is a seasoned crisis management professional. On the evening of January 24—the second day of Wuhan's lockdown and Chinese New Year's Eve—he was moved to tears by a WeChat post about volunteer carpools transporting medical staff. For a moment, he even considered joining the volunteer drivers, but quickly realized his true role lay elsewhere: Advising the government on how to respond to emergencies... With so many issues to address, we must identify the most pressing problems first to get a clear picture of the situation."

In Yu Fasheng's view, the primary task during an infectious disease outbreak is to isolate the source of infection, with containment taking precedence over treatment. He was deeply troubled by the early surge of infected patients seeking treatment at clinics, where each visit risked infecting multiple others, fueling the epidemic's rapid escalation. On January 26, he drove to the construction site of Huoshenshan Hospital. He realized the virus was spreading faster than the construction pace of both Huoshenshan and Leishenshan Hospitals, and the increase in hospital beds could not keep up with the rising number of patients.

A new approach gradually took shape in his mind. According to Caixin Weekly, in the days that followed, "he approached officials he knew, hoping to meet with Wuhan's top leadership at the time to present his key prevention

and control proposals in a ten-minute briefing, but his request was denied." This prompted him to pursue an alternative path of submitting written recommendations. He led several researchers from his team in a three-day marathon effort to draft a systematic operational report titled "Outstanding Problems and Countermeasure Recommendations in the Current Pneumonia Epidemic Prevention and Control." On February 1, he submitted it to relevant officials at the central, Hubei provincial, and Wuhan municipal levels through every available channel—university networks, media outlets, and personal connections. That same afternoon, the discerning Guangming Daily promptly submitted it to the central decision-making bodies as a "special report," which was swiftly adopted by Vice Premier Sun Chunlan.

In this operational report, Yu Fasheng repeatedly emphasized the core theme with three bold exclamation points: "Isolate! Isolate! Isolate as soon as possible!" The specific solution proposed was: Rapidly requisition or repurpose sanatoriums, scenic area hotels, or other facilities with isolation capabilities to create "fully enclosed" medical treatment centers integrating isolation, treatment, and living quarters. This approach could be operational within days—far faster than constructing new hospitals—and would enable the swift admission of all suspected patients.

During those days, Academician Wang Chen, President of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, proposed drawing on the Wenchuan earthquake relief experience to deploy large-space, multi-bed "mobile cabin hospitals."I believe Wang Chen's proposal served as a complementary refinement (e.g., modularization) to Yu Fasheng's "fully enclosed" medical treatment center concept. While Wang Chen appears to have coined the term "large-scale mobile hospital," Yu Fasheng remains its original proponent.

Reports indicate that in Wuhan, one in every four confirmed COVID-19 patients received treatment in a makeshift hospital. The 16 such facilities constructed played a significant role in isolating infectious sources and conserving medical resources (mild cases required only internal medicine-led treatment). Yu Fasheng, Sun Chunlan, and Wang Chen all deserve immense credit for this achievement.

2. What was the essence of Yu Fasheng's contribution to the pandemic response?

The creation, adoption, and implementation of Yu Fasheng's team's

emergency operational report stands as a classic real-world case study of China's modern think tanks. Yu's proactive advocacy represents a traditional and effective form of civic participation, while also embodying the normal exercise of freedom of information and freedom of speech.

Yu Fasheng pioneered the concept of "media early warning," even asserting that citizen-driven early warning constitutes a fundamental civic right. As reported by Caixin, he proposed that "in institutional design, citizens should first report concerns to designated functional departments. If government agencies fail to investigate or respond to such reports, citizens should be able to sue the government." He emphasized that Wuhan's lessons were profoundly costly, stating, "We must never again miss the golden window for emergency response and containment, regardless of the purpose." To prevent "major social risks" that could pose systemic threats to the nation or humanity, potentially leading to strategic losses and catastrophic consequences, a "diverse, independent, and balanced" early warning system should be established. This demonstrates that Yu Fasheng is not only a clear-sighted individual but also an awakened advocate for sovereignty, having elevated "citizen early warning" to a fundamental right of free speech and civic oversight.

As early as late March, Yu Fasheng planned to initiate field investigations after the lockdown ended, with the aim of tracing the "source of the virus" post-pandemic. He stated: "Thousands of compatriots have perished, nearly ten million Wuhan residents are confined to their homes, and over a billion people nationwide endure suffering as the pandemic spreads globally. For such a catastrophe affecting all humanity, it is imperative—both as a scholar and as a Wuhan native—to uncover the full truth of this event and provide accountability to our city and all people." The fate of this plan is predictable.

Yü Fasheng's story reveals him as a true crisis management expert—a man of profound integrity who anticipates every contingency. His operational rationality represents precisely the most scarce resource in a nation where "rough estimates," opportunism, delay-and-wait tactics masquerading as prudence, and last-minute gambles prevail.

Top Figures in the Pandemic Response

8th Place: Zhang Wenhong, Director of Infectious Diseases at Shanghai

Huashan Hospital

1. Zhang Wenhong is not only a master of psychological adjustment but also a rare scientist who speaks truth to power.

Overnight fame, turning one into a national icon, is a journey many celebrities have experienced. Yet in a nation of 1.4 billion people, amid a devastating crisis, only those who can navigate ever-shifting complexities and endure sustained prominence truly live up to their reputation.

In recent months, few scientists globally have matched Zhang Wenhong's extraordinary public communication skills. He distills complex pandemic strategies into plain language, achieving tangible social impact. This is true mastery. "Eat three or four eggs daily." "Quarantine for 14 days; nationwide lockdown for two months to starve the virus.""Guard against fire, theft, and colleagues—if you guard against colleagues, I believe you guard against everything." "We've been studying the temperament of the novel coronavirus. Once you understand its temperament, it no longer seems so mysterious." "Only when our infectious disease departments are truly strong can our nation be safe."... Such concrete or symbolic expressions are not only accessible but also achieve an exceptional fusion of scientific rationality and common-sense logic. Consequently, Zhang Wenhong's frequent media appearances instilled profound reassurance among the public. His immense contributions to social psychological regulation and science communication significantly bolstered voluntary cooperation in proactive prevention and control. "The epidemic must be controlled effectively, and without mobilizing the people, it cannot be contained." Zhang Wenhong's objective has largely been achieved.

Equally important, Zhang Wenhong stands as a rare scientist who refuses to tell falsehoods. In a "nation of lies," achieving this is exceptionally difficult. Among the "three major scientists," Li Lanjuan cannot speak truthfully, Zhong Nanshan refuses to do so, and only Zhang Wenhong has upheld this principle. When publicly questioned by a foreign professor about the accuracy and credibility of China's pandemic data, Zhang responded, "This question is far too sensitive," and abruptly ended the discussion, refusing to endorse falsehoods. When addressing domestic media about the virus's origin, he simply used logical deduction: "If it had spread from abroad to China, multiple cities should have seen simultaneous outbreaks, not

sequential cases." This alone made his point crystal clear. The significance of his "truth-telling" cannot be underestimated. It provides a vital moral example and objective cognitive reference point for countless people who aspire to live honestly and intelligently.

Zhang Wenhong's misprediction of the effectiveness of early pandemic strategies in Europe and America stemmed from the need to balance cautious optimism when assessing other nations' strengths during the initial phase—an inevitable pitfall in macro-level analysis. The true structural flaw in his significant statements lies in his avoidance of discussing the pathological mechanisms and core technical details of treating COVID-19. This is a major error that renders his entire pandemic framework somewhat reduced to pure social-psychological regulation.The core mechanism of "solving the most difficult problem last" cannot be avoided, and in China's pandemic response this year, articulating this point thoroughly was not particularly challenging. In other words, Zhang Wenhong's statements lack substance. If a barrel requires eight planks to be complete, Zhang Wenhong's discourse still falls short by several planks.

2. What is the essence of Zhang Wenhong's contribution to pandemic response?

It lies in the "productive" nature of free speech and the unique efficacy of expert authority directed toward society. Zhang Wenhong's pandemic discourse has exerted immense social-psychological influence, fostering public trust in science and scientists. Many who harbor deep skepticism toward the government have instead placed their trust in scientists as a substitute. Zhang Wenhong's influence essentially represents a form of societal expert authority—the credibility and moral authority that battle-tested professionals command in society. This can be seen as the latest pulse of public authority shifting from the government to civil society. Its social-psychological foundation lies in the deep-seated, inherent respect for truly conscientious scientists that permeates traditional Chinese customs.

Zhang Wenhong once casually remarked to reporters: "This morning I glanced at yesterday's article views and was stunned—860 million." This moment signifies how, after prolonged peaceful growth, an era of professionalization has abruptly arrived. Zhong Nanshan's prominence during the 2003 SARS outbreak was merely a precursor. The true historical

starting point for the rise of expert authority—one that is genuinely oriented toward society and carries sociological significance—seems to lie with Zhang Wenhong. This is not only because social media platforms had become ubiquitous by this point, but primarily because Zhang Wenhong possesses genuine sound judgment and an independent character.

Top Anti-Pandemic Figures

9th Place: Li Lanjuan, Professor at Zhejiang University School of Medicine

1. Why did Li Lanjuan propose the "lockdown" recommendation?

High sensitivity and initiative characterize Li Lanjuan's thinking. As an infectious disease specialist and member of the National Health Commission's high-level expert panel, she proactively requested permission to visit Wuhan on January 17. During a closed-door meeting chaired by Zhong Nanshan on the afternoon of January 19, Li was the first to speak, explicitly advocating for "isolation measures and management as a Class A infectious disease." She urged Wuhan to implement a "no entry, no exit" policy to prevent nationwide outbreaks. This effectively laid the groundwork for the city lockdown strategy.

On the morning of January 20, Premier Li Keqiang presided over a State Council executive meeting where Zhong Nanshan and Li Lanjuan presented their professional opinions. After this agenda item concluded, Premier Li paused the meeting and personally escorted Zhong Nanshan and Li Lanjuan out of the venue. Li Lanjuan later told reporters she was deeply moved. However, in the days that followed, the principal officials of Hubei and Wuhan remained hesitant about enforcing the "no entry, no exit" policy strictly.

Late on January 22, Zhang Ping, Director of the Zhejiang Provincial Health Commission, informed Li Lanjuan by phone that some Zhejiang residents returning from Wuhan had caused secondary infections and cluster outbreaks. Alerted by this, Li once again took proactive action, formally recommending to higher authorities that Wuhan must implement a lockdown immediately before January 24 (Chinese New Year's Eve), or the outbreak would spread more extensively nationwide. By this point, the State Council had adopted a "local responsibility" approach. Just hours later, at 2:00 AM on January 23, the Wuhan Municipal Government announced a lockdown

effective from 10:00 AM that day. (Through this chain of recommendations—from Li Lanjuan to the National Health Commission to Wuhan City—within a few short hours, we can reasonably infer that the lockdown decision was a decisive overnight resolution made by Wuhan officials, including Zhou Xiangwang, later approved by the central government. Zhou Xiangwang's statement on CCTV was truthful.) The situation following the lockdown is now widely known.

Li Lanjuan's proactive and decisive approach stemmed from her frontline experience combating SARS and preventing H7N9 avian influenza. From 1998 to 2008, she served as Director of the Zhejiang Provincial Health Department. "During the SARS outbreak, Zhejiang initially had four imported cases. I immediately isolated over 1,000 people... As a result, Zhejiang saw no secondary infections and no healthcare workers contracted the disease." The combination of the 'lockdown' and the subsequent policy of comprehensive admission and treatment played a pivotal role in completely controlling the outbreak in Wuhan, and Li Lanju made significant contributions to this effort.

Remarkably, in late January, the 73-year-old Li Lanju once again volunteered to the National Health Commission to treat critically ill patients in Wuhan. On February 1, she was tasked with assembling a Zhejiang team integrating infectious disease specialists, artificial liver experts, and critical care physicians. They rushed to Wuhan overnight and were assigned to the ICU ward at Wuhan University People's Hospital East Campus. Here, both patients and medical staff witnessed her compassion and dedication: sleeping only three to four hours daily, she simultaneously managed treatment, training, and strategic consultations. Under her care or with her involvement, hundreds of critically ill patients recovered. Among the "Three Great Scientists," Li Lanjuan was the only one who personally went to Wuhan to participate in frontline treatment. Before departure, facing the concerns of friends and colleagues, she stated, "I am an infectious disease doctor. I must take this risk."

Li Lanju was also highly proactive in offering critical emergency recommendations. Earlier, at a high-level meeting, she strongly urged the central leadership to repurpose several hospitals or conference centers for centralized treatment of mild cases—a proposal that preceded similar

suggestions by Fang Sheng and Wang Chen. When makeshift hospitals were first being constructed, she visited the sites and provided numerous detailed, practical suggestions. It is said that Li Lanjuan's "predictions" to Hubei's top officials regarding the timing for achieving zero cases and lifting lockdowns proved remarkably accurate. She is a rare epidemic expert who possesses both strategic vision and tactical capability.

Compared to Zhang Wenhong and Zhong Nanshan, Li Lanjuan's eloquence falls short—she possesses profound knowledge but struggles to articulate it. Yet, her actions speak louder than words. On the morning of March 31, as she departed Wuhan for Zhejiang, netizens spontaneously chanted "Goddess! Goddess!!"—a testament to her genuine reputation.

2. What is the essence of Li Lanjuan's contributions to the pandemic response?

It lies in the effective exercise of traditional, institutionalized expert advisory authority. Expert consultation represents a crucial branch of modern decentralization, though it has not yet evolved into independent, decision-making expert power.

Li Lanjuan's proactive and decisive actions during this major crisis stem from her decade-long tenure as Zhejiang's Health Commissioner and her experience in two previous pandemic responses. Experts like her—possessing strong personal leadership, substantial administrative experience, and crisis management expertise—seem ideally suited to serve on senior advisory committees in critical sectors.

Li Lanju faced significant controversy for recommending "Shuanghuanglian." However, clarifications suggest her son's company has no connection to the drug. Her husband, also an academician, faced controversy after retiring to establish a private hospital. While these controversies ultimately did not tarnish Li Lanjuan's ethical standing, the "Shuanghuanglian" manufacturer's exploitation of public authority for promotional purposes raises serious concerns about regulatory violations. Public resentment toward such practices can be viewed as a socially justified check on expert authority.

Top Figures in the Pandemic Response

10th Place: Zhong Nanshan, Director of the Respiratory Disease Research Center at the First Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical

University

1. Zhong Nanshan's forthright declaration of "human-to-human transmission" revealed the truth, earning global gratitude and admiration. However, his subsequent evasive statements have steadily diminished his credibility.

During the 2003 SARS epidemic, Zhong Nanshan earned national respect as a fearless hero by insisting that "the culprit is not chlamydia, but a virus." On January 20 this year, he again won profound admiration by publicly declaring at a press conference that "human-to-human transmission is confirmed," piercing the veil of underreporting with bold candor.

According to Hong Kong's Professor Yuen Kwok-yung, during Zhong Nanshan's January 19th investigation in Wuhan with a senior expert team, he repeatedly pressed local officials with unusually sharp questions: "Are there any more cases?" "Are there really more cases than you're reporting?" Only then did he elicit the admission: "It seems there was one case in neurosurgery where one patient infected 14 medical staff." Zhong swiftly extracted the truth through his formidable reputation and relentless pressure, demonstrating his scientific commitment to truth and a profound sense of responsibility. Had the outbreak been concealed for just a few more days, coinciding with the Spring Festival holiday, the number of infected individuals could have been several times higher than current figures! At this critical juncture, Zhong Nanshan earned the foremost credit for his fellow countrymen, elevating his moral stature to the pinnacle achievable by a scientist.

However, after this, Zhong Nanshan seemed to begin a decline. Within a dozen days, netizens exposed that his son was running a company, and rumors spread that Zhong had some special relationship with the manufacturer of "Lianhua Qingwen Capsules." His public endorsement of the capsules raised suspicions of an indirect financial gain. Soon after, the public witnessed Zhong leading a group in publicly pledging to join the Communist Party on the front lines. It remains unclear whether this action was psychologically linked to the aforementioned negative information. Particularly telling was Zhong's early assertion that "the virus originated from bats," only to abruptly shift stance in late February with the claim that "while the virus first appeared in China, it may not have originated here."

This ostensibly indirect endorsement of conspiracy theories—a cowardly compromise—grossly violated scientific and common-sense rationality. It stood in stark contrast to the principled stance of numerous European and American scientists who jointly refuted the "man-made virus" theory. In that instant, Zhong Nanshan's towering moral image crumbled.

Over a decade ago, a resident from Guangzhou's suburbs personally told me that in 1990, when his father was diagnosed with cancer, Professor Zhong Nan Shan arranged for him to receive targeted chemotherapy at Shanghai's Huashan Hospital. Out of sincere gratitude, the family offered 40,000 yuan (a substantial sum in 1990!) to Professor Zhong, who firmly refused it. Zhong Nanshan's sudden fame in 2003 was no accident. He had always conducted himself with integrity, maintained rigorous academic standards, and earned a reputation for "daring to treat and speak out." Yet in recent years, his character seems to have undergone a transformation. In fact, Silicon Valley pioneered the precedent of professors founding technology companies, and countries worldwide encourage this "industry-academia-research integration" model. As for whether scientific authorities have the right to recommend products produced by their own companies or those with which they have vested interests during critical emergencies, and where exactly the boundary between compliance and violation lies—these are matters that can be gradually explored through social practice. Controversy is a natural part of life, but Zhong Nanshan's dramatic reaction makes it seem as though there might be something more to it. His indirect endorsement of conspiracy theories, in particular, constitutes an unacceptable transgression against common decency and conscience. Has Zhong Nanshan cemented his image as a liar? Is he heading toward a complete loss of integrity in his twilight years? Many kind-hearted people who once sincerely respected him now feel pain and concern for him.

2. What is the essence of Zhong Nanshan's contributions to the pandemic response?

It lies in the effective exercise of institutional expert authority.

On this matter, Zhong Nanshan even explicitly proposed that preventing highly contagious diseases could be implemented through an expert accountability system, delegating decision-making authority to the CDC or expert committees. This proposal carries the implication of expert committee

decision-making, which is essentially the institutionalized operation of independent expert authority. However, this is actually unfeasible. We have witnessed in Western nations how many independent expert committees operate with broad authority but minimal accountability, making actual oversight and responsibility-holding difficult. This year, as citizens faced immense calamity, a handful of experts in key positions conflated academic caution with operational urgency. By refusing to make judgments and maintaining personal detachment, they allowed the disaster to escalate step by step. Their severe dereliction of duty, yet freedom from punishment, is truly astonishing. Moreover, having scientific experts make decisions independently is far less effective than having them collaborate with professional politicians. Scientists excel at analysis, while politicians excel at decision-making—a natural division of labor that is difficult to overcome. Scientists also generally lack specialized management knowledge and experience in crisis management. "Different fields are like different mountains"—allowing experts to make decisions independently is essentially a form of overstepping their bounds. The near-total failure of the Chinese CDC headquarters in both the 2003 and 2020 pandemic responses serves as indirect proof of this. Therefore, we must not blindly trust expert authority or advocate for expert decentralization. The fundamental solution to this year's problem of underreporting caused by excessive centralization lies in local decentralization—specifically, allowing prefectural-level governments within a two-hour subway radius to decide whether to disclose outbreaks of highly contagious diseases, and empowering prefectural-level people's congresses to resolve whether to implement special emergency measures. True institutional innovation demands a synthesis of profound historical knowledge, management expertise, and political theory. By drawing inspiration from exemplars like Li Lanjuan andYufasheng, while incorporating practices from the ancient Roman Senate to meticulously select members for an independent expert committee, and drawing on the British experience of "establishing clear judicial remedies for any delegated authority," we might undertake a rigorous experiment in Chinese-style expert committee decentralization.

Conclusion

All rankings inevitably carry shortcomings or omissions. What matters

is striving to grasp deeper, more essential truths. The purpose of establishing this "Pandemic Response Honor Roll" is to strike while the iron is hot—to promptly initiate reflection on lessons from the current major crisis with a more proactive and open mindset, preparing to meet the impending global transformation. Great crises can reveal the depth of reality and reflect the sedimentation of history. We need not merely focus on the immediate; our vision can be broader and more far-reaching.

For years, the chapter "Cao Gu Discusses Warfare" from Zuo Zhuan has appeared in secondary school textbooks. This widely known classic tale contains two crucial political insights: First, the state of Lu still preserved some tribal autonomy, allowing commoners like Cao Gu access to the royal court and a degree of freedom to voice public criticism and policy recommendations before the king. Second, "those who eat meat are narrow-minded and incapable of long-term planning"—how could Duke Zhuang of Lu, who inherited the throne through his father's legacy and hereditary privilege, possess the capacity to navigate major crises and the wars between Qi and Lu? Thus, Cao Gu—a commoner with unique experience—felt compelled to intervene proactively to save the nation in its hour of need. His ability to sit in the king's chariot and offer battlefield guidance was historically interpreted as evidence of the king's enlightenment or wisdom. Today, however, we can discern a deeper implication: it itself demonstrates that natural citizens of the tribal era possessed a certain right to participate in political affairs. Cao Gu's status likely aligned with the "shi" class of his time. In the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the original meaning of "shi" was citizen-soldier, nearly identical to the concept of "polis" in ancient Greece.

Over a century later, Confucius and his disciples emerged. What did they represent? They were the first group of educated, theoretically grounded "scholars" in Chinese history to collectively engage in governance, collectively voice opinions, and collectively pioneer spiritual civilization. Confucianism did not originate in the military hegemony of Jin, known for its harsh laws, but in the Eastern states of Lu and Qi—the most politically advanced regions of China at the time, which had pioneered an era of commoner participation in governance. Only the reality of free speech nurtured under tribal customary law traditions, coupled with a certain reality of commoner participation in political deliberation, could foster individual

sovereignty consciousness and sovereign passion. Like the rising tide of the sea, wave after wave, this gave birth to Confucius and the brilliant original thought and philosophy of the "Hundred Schools of Thought" originating from him (the basic vocabulary of the Laozi is clearly from the early Warring States period, so Laozi essentially came after Confucius).

Hubei, this year's epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, has historically referred to adult men as "male generals" and adult women as "female generals." This tradition seems to preserve a fragment of the cultural DNA inherited from the Chu people of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, as well as from the Chu people of the Han dynasty. What is the essence of these titles? They denote men or women possessing combat capability and authority—in essence, citizen-soldiers. The culture of our great ancestors flows eternally in our blood. It was not purged by ancient Legalist totalitarianism, nor has it been utterly destroyed by modern totalitarianism. This year, Wuhan's "female general" Ai Fen proclaimed the rallying cry, "I'll speak my mind everywhere," which has become widely recognized as the most powerful cry of our era and our nation. In a sense, this cry can be seen as both a sudden eruption of the natural sovereignty consciousness passed down through generations of Chu people, stemming from their cultural bloodline in times of crisis, and as the spirit of "Cao Gu's Discussion on Warfare" and Confucius's teaching of commoners' participation in governance entering a new great cycle 2,600 years later. From figures like Li Wenliang, Fang Fang, Yu Fasheng, and Zhang Wenhong, from the conscientious journalists who interviewed Zhang Xiaochun and Ai Fen, from the citizen reporters like Chen Qiusheng, Fang Bin, Li Huaze, and Zhang Zhan, and from countless citizens who voiced their anger online or daily shared Fang Fang's Diary and journalists' quality articles, we can widely observe a fusion of natural sovereignty consciousness and political sovereignty consciousness nurtured by modern liberal democratic thought. This represents one of the greatest spiritual gains for the Chinese people this year. It is not static enlightenment, but a response to great peril—a profound awakening, a metamorphosis, or a phoenix rising from the ashes amidst immense crisis.

June 1, 2020

Excerpts from Eighty-One Principles of Exploring Life's Primordial Truth

Volume I

1. Zhongtu, Zhongyuan, Zhonghua. This is my land, my homeland, my nation. My past life has been filled with chance, turbulence, and uncertainty, yet also brimming with passionate loyalty, natural artistry, and dark humor—often leaving me in hearty laughter. Life is mystical, splendid, and magnificent, its essence beyond words. How to proceed next? Act naturally, evolve naturally, and live sovereignly upon one's own land.

2. Every person possesses two iron hammers: one is the hammer of fate, the other is the hammer of personal sovereignty within oneself. Why shouldn't one who loves life return to the battlefield of existence? Bravely step into the layers of mist, letting these two hammers take turns striking down, fiercely hammering one's flesh and blood into an artwork, into primordial truth, or even into a transparent, eternal sculpture of time.

3. Truth resides not only in the future but primarily in the present. A life pursuing natural innocence must ride the wings of the present, either mastering its torrential currents or being swept along by them. It must intuitively feel the rhythm, cadence, and beauty of chance in the present—along with its mystery, depth, and eternity.

4. The most mature fruit of human civilization today is the sovereign individual. Humanistic truth lies external to the self, while personal sovereignty resides within. "Man can uphold the Way; the Way does not uphold man." Only a sovereign life dares to bear the destiny of "revering Heaven and following the Way"—a fate inevitably fraught with hardship, tragedy, and rupture, yet magnificent and sublime—and dares to shoulder the weight of mountains, rivers, and earth upon its own shoulders.

5. The passion of life is to prove myself, defend myself, expand myself, and create myself anew—propelling me toward nobler, more compassionate, more majestic, and more ideal realms.

6. I thank Heaven for bestowing upon me this life of sensitivity, passion, and noble essence! To possess this cosmic surfing opportunity—a chance that comes but once every 3.5 billion years—is the greatest blessing for an individual's life.

7. If you believe only in ironclad inevitability, you cannot appreciate life's serendipitous beauty. Life's richness first requires granting "chance" a structural role.

Life is the universe's scarcest resource—do not hastily deplete it, nor rush to witness its conclusion. It relies on infinite chance, surprise, and turbulence to forge deeper, broader, and grander horizons.

8. Destiny is elusive, the future unknowable—this is precisely one of life's greatest charms. True life is woven from the serendipity of chance.

A successful entrepreneur might counter: "There's no such thing as 'chance upon chance' in my world." Well, then, "chance upon chance" awaits you just ahead.

9. After three decades of rapid economic growth, information explosion, and the organic rise of grassroots sovereignty, the next thirty years will be an explosion of opportunity. A simple sketch on a blank sheet of paper reveals this conclusion. The focus should not be on problems; the foremost priority is seizing opportunities. A path of civilizational innovation on par with the Hundred Schools of Thought, Tang poetry, or the philosophical, artistic, and political breakthroughs of ancient Athens is quietly unfolding beneath the feet of people across China, the US, India, Europe, and beyond. Among the vast seas of humanity, there will surely be those who intuitively grasp this truth.

10. Poets deify mountains and rivers; philosophers deify human existence. Doers empower mountains and rivers; empower human existence.

Volume II

11. Human beings are nurtured and cherished by their parents from birth, thus loving their parents and extending that love to siblings—this is the primary fact of individual existence.

"Human nature is inherently good" is the outcome and structural crystallization of this natural reciprocal bond of love. Human nature is a historical construct. Looking back to ancient times, it is reasonable to infer that human nature emerged from the mutual love and protection between

mothers and their children.

12. "Compassion is inherent in all people" is a mistaken proposition. Sympathy and affection are two distinct emotions, yet Mencius conflated them. The origin of benevolence lies not in sympathy, but in the mutual love and protection between kin.

Modern philosophers often assert that "sympathy is the universal force of society." Yet the truth is that humanity's fundamental experience of mutual love and protection constitutes the universal force underpinning all societies.

13. Sympathy is never selfish, yet in most instances it fails to translate into effective action. Mutual love and mutual protection, however, act first—by using loving deeds to elicit loving responses and deepening the intensity of love through existential mutual aid.

The sufficiency of love is evidenced by its private qualities—exclusivity, reciprocity, intensity—which constitute its natural, primordial essence.

14. As a positive, joyful, and transparent natural emotion, love may seem superficial, but it is not. Mutual love encompasses respect for character, steadfastness in trials, and shared destiny—even environmental protection. Such behaviors reveal the profound depth of love.

15. Witnessing children's profound love for their mothers, I naturally conclude that human nature is noble. This stems from evolved humans endowing infants with an extraordinary capacity for loving perception and response, nurtured within a culturally mutual love-and-protection environment.

The profound affection between parents and children, and among siblings, is a naturally noble form of "selfishness." The journey from loving one's kin to loving strangers and all of humanity—from noble selfishness to noble selflessness—is a gradual process of expanding one's perspective and projecting affection. It is not a polar swing between selfishness and selflessness, where one diminishes as the other grows.

What defines the greatest character of Chinese culture? — It is benevolent love rooted in nature. Specifically, it means naturally loving and protecting one's kin, then naturally extending that love and protection to others, fellow countrymen, and all under heaven.

16. Love is not instinct but a spiritual-emotional capacity of higher life forms. It inherently contains fundamental rational judgment."If there were not a single drop of blood, what would love be?" If there were no love or pain, what would reason be? Why do people not love a stone? Why do they love humanity more than animals, cherish kin more than strangers, and adore the lovable more than the detestable? Love inherently contains fundamental rational judgment. Reason is merely the stream of sensuous consciousness comparing, calculating, and planning within the measure of love.

17. The linguistic reason assumed by modern Western philosophy to reside in the innermost chamber of the brain's vast room is merely a stream of auditory consciousness akin to the visual imagery stream, while logical reasoning constitutes the imagery stream itself. Thus, reason is but one sensation, one emotion. The operational reason guiding human causality in every moment is merely a more technical, cooler, and detached passion.

18. Children are exceptionally important to their parents—this is a fact, a value-laden fact. Value arises from the emotional judgments of being loved, being regarded as important, and being deemed worthy of love. Human beings naturally exist within relationships of loving and being loved; thus, life is inherently a value-laden existence. Value is humanity's second air. Within the intangible culture of every community lies an implicit hierarchy of values that compels people to climb, strive, and compete.

19. Were you born and raised amidst hardship and adversity? Have you risen only to fall again and again? Has fate beaten you until blood and tears flowed, even torn you apart? If so, you ought to possess a deeper sensitivity to human nature, human emotion, and humanity. You stand closer to the earth, closer to primordial truth and nature.

20. Pain, misfortune, sorrow, and fear are all structurally positive components of life's emotions. The fundamental behavior of human individuals is information control activity, positive feedback under negative feedback. These seemingly negative emotions reveal the basic realities of existence and the causal forces of life. Moreover, amid this feedback and reflection, a new emotional storm is quietly brewing—one in which life itself takes center stage.

Volume III

21. Life holds many dangers, among which one of the greatest is living

a life of little value, or even meaninglessness.

22. Li Bai had already attained the philosophical heights of singing and lamenting "eternal sorrow," while Du Fu remained at the stage of refining and carving fragments of life. More crucially, Li Bai lived with sovereign autonomy—a Zhuangzi-like, Mencius-like existence, a primal, natural way of being—whereas Du Fu had yet to escape the shadow of Qu Yuan's dependent mindset. Fortunately, like Li Bai, Du Fu possessed a natural, unadorned compassion for the common people, living within a noble realm of human affection and shared suffering. Li Bai's poem "Staying at the Home of Old Woman Xun Beneath Wusong Mountain" and Du Fu's "The Year Draws to a Close, the North Wind Blows Strongly" bear witness to this.

23. "The sorrow of ten thousand ages" refers to the great dream and great awakening spoken of by Zhuangzi and the Buddha—the ultimate awakening of the human individual to life: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why do I live? Does my fleeting life, marching step by step toward eternal darkness, hold any meaning? What meaning can I use to completely counterbalance the emptiness and absurdity of life and the vanishing into nothingness of death?

Total awakening seeks total resolution. To traverse completely from this shore to the other shore—transcending the ever-changing turmoil of the present world and entering another kind of eternal mystery—is the core theme of religious philosophy and the source of its profound greatness.

24. Sovereign life respects this philosophical wisdom that transcends vast spacetime, yet it possesses a unique innovation: to sovereign life, eternal sorrow is eternal opportunity—one of life's greatest wonders. Sovereign life seeks to ignite existence in this realm and the present moment through positive values, to live life fully and intensely through the sequence of love, pain, affection, the beauty of change and turbulence, nobility, and sublime, tragic beauty, allowing life to burn and soar within the eternal cosmos. The essence of this ultimate resolution lies in this: I alone bestow meaning upon my life.

25. Today, people universally know they must be themselves. But what kind of self should they be? The common answer is, "One must possess a unique personality."—Very well, but it still lacks that innate nobility, that natural regal bearing, that spontaneous surge of passion.

26. Personal sovereignty is the most explosive philosophical concept in the world, carrying three layers of meaning: the first is my absolute control over my own body and mind; the second is my shared sovereignty over language, culture, economy, politics, and other societal domains; the third is my right to shape the value of my own life journey.

27. The abstraction of sovereignty is a monumental leap. It elevates supreme power from factual existence to a value-based principle, shifts it from within power structures to beyond them, transforms it from a crisis-driven right of resistance into a normalized, procedural authority, and ultimately evolves from totalitarian sovereignty into individual sovereignty over body and mind, individual sovereignty over society, and individual sovereignty over shaping one's life value.

28. Higher animals possess natural control over their own bodies and minds, yet they lack recognition, respect, and safeguards from their own kind. Humans are the opposite. Ancient Wuhuan tribesmen "killed their fathers and brothers in anger, yet never harmed their mothers, for mothers belonged to the clan, and fathers and brothers bore no mutual enmity." (Book of the Later Han: Biographies of the Wuhuan and Xianbei) This classic historical record demonstrates that individual life constitutes the right to life and sovereignty over life only when grounded in stable, intrinsic respect and protection from others.

29. Love and being loved arise precisely because one is lovable and worthy of love. Since every individual is an equal supreme being—the essence of the cosmos—possessing supreme spiritual value and exceptional capacity for loving and being loved, the social community acknowledges their personal sovereignty and rights, providing active safeguards. The infinite nobility of human life, confirmed by this humanitarian truth, constitutes the ultimate source of personal sovereignty.

30. The sovereign individual is a force unto themselves—a fortress, or a mountain in motion. This stems not only from their inherent strength, wisdom, and social networks, but more importantly from their authority to mobilize public resources and coordinate societal forces. In this sense, we may say that individual sovereignty is the "regal aura" bestowed upon every human life by civilization and humanitarian truth. The radiant brilliance it emanates stands in stark contrast to the collectivist "worker bee, worker ant

duty theory" that degrades and tramples upon human dignity.

Trump's "emergency inaccuracies" and "political incorrectness" vs. "Correct Policy Direction"

Based on past experience, the outcome of the U.S. election is largely set, and future legal challenges are unlikely to overturn it. Discussing the significance and deeper issues of the U.S. election at this juncture is not only timely but also carries a fresh quality and a sense of synchronous dynamism.

1. Trump's defeat appears primarily rooted in "inappropriate responses" and "political incorrectness."

In mature democracies, when internal political disputes intensify and divisions deepen, the optimal solution is not moral appeals, media bickering, or street clashes but rather legitimate, cyclical institutional mechanisms: removing unpopular incumbents through elections when majority discontent reaches a tipping point.

Some Chinese advocates of liberal democracy, driven by self-interest, favored Trump's victory in the U.S. election. Yet they clearly underestimated the immense anger—and its natural legitimacy—stirred among Democrats, diverse ethnic groups, the intellectual class, and independent media by the controversies of the 2016 election, suspicions of Russian interference, and Trump's relentless challenges to "political correctness" over the following three years. Outsiders cannot fathom the pain and suffering of insiders; a guest's free-riding calculations cannot supplant the host's core concerns.

It is widely believed that in this election, Trump's defeat stemmed primarily from his incompetence and inability to effectively manage the pandemic that has already claimed over 200,000 lives. Taking proactive and decisive action within the U.S. institutional framework to control and eradicate the pandemic is now the foremost priority for American society. During the second debate, Biden directly accused Trump of bearing responsibility for the deaths of over 220,000 Americans from COVID-19, stating that "anyone responsible for this situation should not continue to serve as President of the United States." This sentiment likely resonated with

many voters. Thus, Trump's defeat reasonably reflects the genuine majority opinion in America today.

Resolving internal disputes and deep-seated conflicts through peaceful party rotation, while fulfilling the majority's political demand for change amid crisis, represents one of democracy's most practical and elegant virtues. The Democratic victory, in the most common-sense terms, merely demonstrates democracy's self-regulating capacity. Reiterating this common sense may seem to reveal no particular skill, yet throughout history, the most frequent and gravest errors have often stemmed from defying common sense. For China's freedom and democracy movement, the meaningful question may be: Why does a certain overly passionate group severely defy common sense and rationality, persistently losing touch with reality and indulging in illusory fantasies? Will they continue to do so "for the long term," both externally and internally? What is the deeper meaning behind this?

2. The true value of the 70 million votes Trump received lies in a certain "correctness of direction."

In this election, both Biden and Trump set records for the number of votes received. This phenomenon signifies a left-right balance and bipartisan equilibrium, serving as a crucial pillar of a mature democratic system. Its underlying trajectory carries deeper significance: dynamic political competition seeking greater representativeness drives parties to creatively absorb and proactively shape domestic public opinion.

Trump has repeatedly claimed that his performance over the past three years was outstanding and that without the COVID-19 pandemic, he would not have trailed so significantly in the polls. Some recent commentators suggest that the 70 million votes Trump received primarily stemmed from party-line voting by right-wing voters rather than personal endorsement. I disagree with this assessment.

In my view, Trump has achieved at least three significant governance accomplishments over the past three years: (1) He vigorously promoted full employment and economic growth through large-scale tax cuts, demonstrating that this businessman-turned-president is indeed an expert in economic affairs; (2) By proclaiming and implementing the "America First" agenda, he has corrected past missteps, shifting the primary focus of American politics from "imperial priorities" to "domestic priorities."

Ordinary citizens, severely harmed by overly generous (for America) globalization and the burdens of an overextended empire, are gradually receiving some compensation in terms of both psychological rights and economic interests. (3) Surprisingly yet logically consistent with his approach, Trump did not initiate a single foreign war during his four-year term. This represents a significant contribution to world peace and humanitarian causes by a conservative Republican president—a fact that observers have widely overlooked.

These three factors represent the true value behind Trump's 70 million votes. Their essence lies in a certain "correctness of direction"—namely, conservatism toward U.S. domestic interests, rather than the conservatism toward traditional values interpreted by overly religious political commentators. This conservatism is Trumpian, not Reaganesque.

If Trump gracefully concedes defeat after exhausting all American legal avenues, his historical legacy could be effectively preserved. This would solidify the Republican base, ushering the American political right into the era of Trumpism—a time defined by America First and prioritizing conservatism toward domestic interests.

However, considering that the key states where Trump secured victory in this election appear largely situated in America's non-mainstream cultural regions, coupled with his administration's repeated affronts over the past four years to globally fundamental civilizational values—such as respect for multiculturalism, respect for women, respect for the Fourth Estate, adherence to moral integrity and gentlemanly conduct, and safeguarding procedural justice—this era of Trumpism—correct in principle yet politically incorrect, championing substantive justice while disregarding procedural justice—may not prove wholly positive for the Republican Party. Regardless, Trump's historical legacy will not be a drawing on sand or a bubble in the air; future generations will undoubtedly see those who rise by reinterpreting Trumpism.

3. Independent media's robust counteraction against the overreach of supreme power serves as the best advertisement for democratic systems.

Currently, a handful of authoritarian suppressors are exploiting the U.S. election dispute to smear democracy as a totalitarian system—an effort doomed to futility. For a nation of 300 million and the world's foremost democracy, the current turmoil is insignificant. As seen in videos, street

protests by a minority of Republican grassroots supporters who perceive opponents' vote-stealing have generally remained civil and restrained. Incivility primarily stems from the boundless spread of online rumors, with extreme instances unfortunately linked to Chinese communities that have not long nurtured by democratic values.

Twitter's stringent restrictions on President Trump's overstepping attacks and baseless allegations, coupled with U.S. media outlets collectively cutting off his live broadcasts when he made sweeping fraud accusations without concrete evidence, these core details that astonished and moved the entire world exemplify the most beautiful aspects of a mature democracy. We might even say that the robust countermeasures taken by independent media against the highest authority's overreach reflect the greatness, grandeur, and brilliance of American democracy. All this serves as the finest advertisement for democratic systems. Compared to these highlights, what dark aspects could possibly matter? For generations to come, these classic and timeless details will be endlessly revisited and emulated. In such a civilized society, where checks and balances permeate every corner, the gradual encroachment of power and the emergence of institutionalized personal dictatorship are highly unlikely. We can confidently assert that American democracy will not decline due to the controversies surrounding this presidential election. On the contrary, it will gain new vitality precisely because of the numerous counterattacks from the underdog.

Biden's repeated calls for national unity, his measured approach during the early voting phase, his decisive action following the federal judge's intervention order (Supreme Court Justice Alito ordered Pennsylvania to separate and count ballots received after 8 PM on election night) and Trump's second baseless victory claim (Biden declared his own victory just one hour later), and his impassioned victory speech all demonstrate that the seemingly unremarkable Biden is anything but ordinary. A similar example is former President George H.W. Bush, who, though perceived as unremarkable, led the United States to a Gulf War victory whose brilliance rivaled the ancient Greek Battle of Protium, proving himself one of the finest political strategists in American history.

Since Roosevelt, America's elected presidents have largely been the finest political figures, including President Carter—whose governance skills

may have seemed lacking—whose moral stature alone made him a global exemplar. This sufficiently demonstrates that mature democratic systems possess the best mechanisms for selecting the most capable leaders. Of course, the most outstanding individuals are not necessarily the most rule-abiding ones—a truth universally acknowledged throughout history and across cultures.

The group of heroes behind bars constitutes the moral foundation for building a future democratic society.

China's democracy and rights defense movement has achieved multiple world firsts in humanity's three-century struggle for freedom, most notably in the abundance of moral integrity and talent.

Currently, thousands of independent, grassroots freedom heroes have emerged, having endured severe trials and tribulations. Among them, dozens who spent decades behind bars stand as pinnacles of this group, such as:

Mr. Liu Xianbin of Suining, Sichuan, who served 25 and a half years in prison with serene composure;

Mr. Zhang Shanguang from Huaihua, Hunan, who endured 16 and a half years of imprisonment with eyes as pure as a young deer's,

Mr. Zhu Yufu of Hangzhou, who endured 16 and a half years in prison, his voice booming like a bell, striding tall with a flowing beard like an immortal,

Mr. Chen Wei of Suining, Sichuan, who endured 15 years of imprisonment with an iron will and an upright character,

Mr. Yang Qinheng of Shanghai, who served 10 years and returned from overseas to continue his work with an ever-present gentle smile,

Mr. Zha Jianguo of Beijing, imprisoned for nine years, with a magnanimous spirit and a writing style that is both principled and balanced...

Though the media spotlight has not shone upon them, they are the true representatives of resistance—unbowed, steadfast, and growing stronger with each setback. They are the national elite nurtured by the ideals of freedom and democracy. Their convictions are pure, their conduct impeccable, their character nearly crystalline. They have no record of harming, stepping on, or causing scandals. "The longer they are imprisoned, the purer their hearts become; the longer they are imprisoned, the loftier their character rises" is precisely their portrait. When I interact with some of the elders, I am always deeply moved, and reflecting on it afterward, I often find myself with tears in my eyes.

The list of other heroic figures currently imprisoned is too long to enumerate here due to space constraints. Some observers persistently "look elsewhere," seemingly underestimating the moral value and personal integrity demonstrated by the hundreds of suffering yet heroic democracy activists behind bars in contemporary China and their steadfast families. In truth, the idealism, profound virtue, and radiant personal charisma of these hundreds of pioneers who have borne suffering and calamity for the cause of democracy far surpass those depicted in Russian novels or recorded in the memoirs of freedom fighters worldwide! We can even state unequivocally that the pinnacle of humanity's three-century struggle for liberty resides here. South Africa had Mandela, Czechoslovakia had Havel, Burma had Aung San Suu Kyi—yet China possesses dozens of Mandelas, Havels, and Aung San Suu Kyi. Moreover, it is not merely one outstanding hero who has emerged, but a multitude of heroes—dozens, even hundreds—standing like peaks across the Chinese land. This is a flat structure, the best possible framework for building constitutional democracy, and the most profound source of pride for our generation: for the ideals of freedom and democracy, we have resisted collectively; we have persevered tenaciously at multiple points of leverage; we have never given up. Only China's democracy and rights defense movement has produced such a constellation of brilliant figures. The reason for this can likely only be explained by the unique cultural traditions of the Chinese nation.

When asked, "What resources do you have?" I always respond:

Our greatest resource lies in the moral integrity and ethical character of our heroes behind bars. They are the "moral origin" of the cause of freedom and democracy, and they will inevitably become the moral origin of the entire Chinese nation. Building a value system for freedom and democracy will begin from this moral origin; transforming spiritual strength into political power and turning ideals into reality will also begin there.

Our generation grew up in a totalitarian society, and some who participated in promoting freedom inevitably absorbed elements of the power-struggle philosophy inherent in modern totalitarianism and traditional authoritarianism. Some say, "Politics is about using any means necessary; since ancient times, noble ends have justified any means. You are too kind-hearted to survive the treacherous political arena..." No. The souls of

freedom-seekers, tempered by countless hardships, have been purified to a high degree. We reject such logic. We will not engage in the sordid, treacherous politics of the past. We seek to establish a bright, transparent, and upright political civilization. We do not need to treat fleeting political power as the supreme value. Our gaze is fixed upon noble spiritual ideals. Our entire lives are dedicated to the great cause of humanitarian civilization and constitutional democracy, steadfastly guarding its fundamental principles and boundaries:

We absolutely refuse to accept any dilution of pure liberal democratic values and institutions by internal or external actors.

The goals of freedom and democracy must be achieved through the means of freedom and democracy.

Active citizen groups fighting for freedom must resolve internal disputes through civilized rules.

Those who habitually lose control, overstep boundaries, trample others, or engage in reckless attacks—if temporarily unable to reform—must be progressively marginalized to cool their ardor;

Negative tendencies that undermine our own strength—extreme literary romanticism, unrestrained hatred that seeks to destroy everything and create enemies everywhere, preventing others from turning adversaries into allies; opportunistic thinking that relies on seniority without contributing, passively waiting to "free-ride"; and the mindset of internalizing authoritarianism while externally yearning for strongman rule—can be gradually overcome through the exemplary leadership of our heroic comrades behind bars, the moral self-reflection of those with pure ideals, constructive criticism from all sides, and the courage to take action...

We must establish a humane politics rooted in benevolence, integrity, and moderation. The fervent camaraderie and shared destiny that permeate our democratic rights movement should, through deliberate effort, gradually extend to our entire nation and even all humanity. We will use authentic humanitarian civilization to discipline and elevate ourselves, and likewise employ it to exemplify, persuade, assimilate, and embrace all our compatriots.

The core resource of the democracy and rights movement must and can be expanded from moral value into political strength. Its pivotal hub and

primal engine lies in the idealism, profound virtue, and moral stature of the heroes behind bars. This is not an exaggeration of the power of a few; the rebuilding of the value hierarchy of the Chinese nation must begin with certain noble lives. Yan Yuan, a great scholar of the Qing Dynasty, stated: "Scholars should not entrust the power to transform society to fate and destiny. When one person practices it, it becomes scholarship; when many follow it, it becomes custom." Later, Wu Chengdong added, "To restore decency to the world, one must first look to one or two individuals who possess it. When power suffices to effect change, restore through governance and education; when power falls short, restore through scholarship... and surely others will rise in response to the call." Zeng Guofan put this strategy of "shifting societal trends" into practice, achieving modest success. If scholars of profound virtue and integrity can achieve this, how much more so our democratic rights movement—already boasting thousands of freedom champions tested by adversity, dozens to hundreds of steadfast heroes forged behind bars, and millions upon millions of citizens awakening politically behind us! Marching along the correct political path, relying on idealism, moral integrity, and the pursuit of ever-higher personal virtue, we anticipate greater achievements for ourselves. We also anticipate that more emerging forces of freedom will surpass us and excel beyond us.

China's future religious landscape may feature "five religions coexisting."

Now is the eve of a decisive breakthrough in the fundamental human rights of the Chinese people, and it is also the opportune moment to discuss the future landscape of religious freedom in China.

During the Tang Dynasty—China's most prosperous era, when its people experienced minimal constraints, the highest cultural refinement, and the greatest freedom—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism coexisted as "Three Religions Standing Side by Side." Looking ahead to a near future where citizens in a free and democratic China enjoy substantive, institutionalized legal and human rights protections for religious freedom, China's religious landscape may evolve into a "Five Religions Standing Side by Side."

(1) Confucianism, which regards reverence for the Way of Heaven as its highest experience, is essentially a rational religion. This bears striking resemblance to the modern belief in a "non-personal God" espoused by scientists-philosophers like Einstein. Thus, the religious perspective of Chinese Confucianism is remarkably progressive, seemingly two millennia ahead of its time. In a future society where all citizens are college-educated intellectuals with rich natural science literacy, explicit and implicit adherents to Confucianism's Heavenly Way may reach super-massive proportions. The profound emotional identification with the eternal roots of China—ancestral lands, life histories, and cultural traditions—could powerfully propel a revived strand of Confucianism toward pan-religious belief.

However, Confucianism's greatest structural flaw lies in its lack of enduring small-unit legal property rights and the powerful spiritual cohesion found in monotheistic religions.

(2) The Buddhist tradition, originating from the teachings of Shakyamuni, may be the most philosophically profound religion in human society. Over the past millennium, this philosophically oriented religion has seemingly become partially entangled in intricate conceptual elaborations.

Should it undergo further simplification and modernization, its capacity for unification and influence would likely be unparalleled. The Chinese people are fortunate to possess both the great traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and Han Chinese Buddhism. Preserving the religious and cultural flame of Buddhism for countless generations is the eternal mission of the Chinese people. Though I am not a Buddhist myself, I still believe it is quite possible that the Dalai Lama's view is correct: in the coming centuries, a modernized, liberalized Buddhism may well attract the largest number of adherents in China. As for the distant future, that remains unknown.

(3) Taoism, a niche religion, possesses a uniquely universal cultural gene: the pursuit of eternity through material cultivation. On the "outward journey" level, its fundamental path inherits and expands the ancient tradition of seeking immortality—"riding clouds, commanding dragons, and roaming beyond the four seas." In the future era of widespread personal flight, it may evolve into an exceptionally elegant and adventurous lifestyle. On the "looking inward" level, Taoism's methods for nurturing vitality, cultivating the mind, and preserving primordial energy are almost unfathomably profound.

(4) Christianity synthesizes the essence of Jewish culture, Greco-Roman civilization, and medieval-modern Western thought. Its cultural, civilizational, and historical foundations are the most profound among all religions, spanning the three major civilizations of human history in an unbroken thread. This foreshadows its enduring potential for infinite adaptability.

In my humble view, Christianity's philosophical essence lies in the utmost liberation of the sacred spirit. Christianity transforms humanity's worship and pursuit of the Supreme Being, eternity, and holiness into extreme emotionalization, the sanctification of emotion, the artistic expression of sacred tragedy, and the infinite spiritualization of tragedy. It charts a path of infinite individual ascent toward the "eternality of sacred emotion and sacred spirit." This original positioning of eternal spiritual life is beyond the reach of philosophy and science, rendering them incapable of substitution.

China's emerging Free Christian movement possesses boundless vitality, fervently aspiring to propel Christianity into the dominant religion

of a future free China. Yet they face immense and formidable challenges: reconciling the separation of church and state; resolving conflicts between ecclesiastical love and traditional Chinese familial bonds; and balancing the propagation of Western cultural currents with the preservation of Chinese cultural roots.

(5) In ancient times, the devout worship of Islam's followers once evoked profound astonishment among the overly secularized Han Chinese in the Central Plains of China. Today, with nearly 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide, such flourishing must stem from profound and deep-rooted causes. Islam possesses an innate, ingenious organizational gene. In terms of expansiveness and endurance, it may surpass any other religion or organization in history. Islam's strict requirements for religious observance, coupled with the intrinsic connection between the difficulty of worship, devotion, sense of mission, and nobility, have enabled Islam to masterfully reshape the fundamental values of people living in harsh and complex regions.

We cannot dismiss the vital necessity of diverse traditional cultures ascending toward a universal civilization grounded in human rights under the pretext of "cultural pluralism." The great doctrines and customs of Islam still demand continuous reform and reinvention today. The secularization and liberalization processes in nations like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Malaysia offer effective models and inspiration. Within China, multiple ethnic groups adhere to Islam, and Islamic culture constitutes one of the core mainstream components of Chinese civilization. This represents a tremendous fortune for the Chinese people. China's future immense national strength will provide a grand platform for the modernization and universal dissemination of the great Islamic faith. In a free and democratic China, religious freedom and human rights should, and indeed can, advance hand in hand.

"Five religions coexisting side by side"—this is my fundamental vision for religious coexistence. Viewed through the lens of history, the deep roots of major religions in China's soil, coexisting civilly and elegantly, represent a state cherished by the Chinese people, who highly value "gentleness, kindness, respect, frugality, and humility." Narrow-minded, exclusionary, polarized thinking, doctrinal disputes, and sectarian hostility will sooner or

later prove "unsuited to China's soil."

For these five great religions, and for all religions that are free, open, tolerant, and civilized, I hold the most sincere wishes.

Outline for Political System Transformation and Civic Political Society

1. The vigorous rise of a civic political society amid rapid economic growth represents a major Chinese innovation. This historic development transcends all past historical precedents and crisis-revolutionary dogmas.

2. The intensity of repression faced by the rights defense movement is rare in the world's third wave of democratization. Its sweeping scale exemplifies the characteristics of a major nation's transformation. A nation of 1.3 billion people, having experienced traditional imperial rule, the impact of modern Western civilization, and the cross-experimentation of democratic politics and totalitarianism, will undergo a historical transformation that will be a complex and magnificent epic beyond prior imagination.

3. Why does intensified suppression only fuel greater escalation in the rights defense movement? This warrants serious examination. Traditional suppression tactics—such as nipping movements in the bud through targeted suppression or counterterrorism-style elimination—have proven largely ineffective. Instead, they paradoxically propel the freedom, democracy, and rights defense movement deeper into Chinese society, propelling it onto the historical stage. Old-fashioned thinking remains utterly perplexed by this phenomenon, precisely because it fails to grasp the movement's historical foundations and innovative nature.

4. The tragic yet progressive layers of democratic movements from 1980 to 1998—the immense bloodshed and enlightenment of the 1989 student movement, the triumphant spread of liberal theory under the cover of debates with the New Left—collectively forged the political and theoretical foundations of civil society. Meanwhile, the rapid development of the market economy fueled widespread individual empowerment, materially expanding and sustaining a diverse, flat civil society.

5. Mainland China's prolonged period of high-speed yet unjust economic growth has continually torn apart the interests and emotions of its people, particularly among the peasantry and middle-class intellectuals. The

repeated friction between modern market society and post-totalitarian politics, coupled with the violent exploitation of the lower classes by bureaucratic privilege hierarchies, has made legal services an extremely scarce yet highly demanded public good within Chinese society.

6. The dissemination of universal ideals and the widespread rise of individual capabilities inevitably lead to the widespread awakening of popular sovereignty consciousness; The eastward spread of Western learning, the revival of traditional Chinese culture, and the rapid growth of Christianity and Buddhism have eroded the hypocritical moralism and cold-blooded collectivism of totalitarianism, inevitably leading to the widespread awakening of people's moral conscience. The arduous and tragic struggle for freedom, democracy, and human rights has inevitably led to a widespread awakening of people's sense of courage and responsibility.

7. Another vital source contributing to the free-thinking foundation of civic society is the literary and artistic movement revived after 1978. Poetry and fiction are inherently free; their tender, sentimental sensibilities stand in stark opposition to the rigid, icy nature of totalitarianism. Humanism is the natural ally of liberalism. Poetry and fiction from the 1980s, primarily authored by new and old right-wing writers, reinforced our aesthetic preference for freedom and rights from an emotional perspective.

8. The essence of the rights defense movement lies in advancing the transformation and emergence of universal norms. It not only targets grassroots rescue and the tragic explorations of freedom fighters but fundamentally extends the affirmation of freedom and rights for the middle-class working strata (including intellectuals and entrepreneurs) into a blueprint for comprehensive sharing. By facilitating the "tripartite integration of labor, knowledge, and capital," it overcame the marginality of past struggles, successfully helping grassroots citizens and freedom-democracy fighters transition into rule-making and mainstream civic political life.

9. The era of specialization, the era of middle-class mainstreaming, the era of seeking stability and fearing chaos—this constitutes the fundamental social psychological framework of our times. The creativity of the rights defense movement lies in its alignment with the public's rights demands and fundamental psychological disposition, achieving a delicate balance between

resistance and conservatism. Through micro-ripples rather than major conflicts, it continuously expands the strata drawn into its vortex, successfully establishing a deep-seated social mobilization mechanism during an era of rapid economic growth when rulers believed themselves secure.

10. The recognition and yearning for a life of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law represent a consensus across society. Those in power who send their children abroad while violently suppressing dissent domestically do not lack this consensus. Instead, they deliberately use violence to perpetuate lies, promote flawed ideologies, and sustain post-totalitarian rule for personal and group interests. Yet these old tactics have reached a dead end. Reformers within the Chinese government are gradually embracing new concepts: a rebellion of conscience, a conversion of belief, and an investment in opportunity.

11. Is advocating professional integrity a disgrace? The rights defense movement must leverage professional expertise to continue enlightening and mobilizing the highly specialized class. Is it shameful to welcome reform and reformers? This is the essential demand of liberalism's pluralistic and tolerant ideology. Seeking consensus with reformers and pragmatists within the ruling establishment to minimize (not eliminate!!!) the inevitable turbulence and bloodshed of transition is fundamental political correctness.

12. The debate over reform, revolution, and gradualism is an outdated topic from the Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen era and the 1920s, now of low academic value. The Xinhai Revolution fully demonstrated the profound synergy among these three approaches in both fundamental principles and practical implementation. For contemporary China, a single counterexample suffices to illustrate this point: since 1998, Chinese politics has seen minimal reform and more regression, because totalitarianism understands that genuine political reform inevitably leads to fundamental transformation.

13. No one willingly endures enslavement and mental control. Political transformation following the collapse of totalitarian experiments is China's historical destiny. Political transformation = liberal democratic revolution. Three interrelated and progressive revolutionary concepts exist: 1. Proactive reform constitutes a revolution, as it fundamentally entails institutional transformation. 2. Peaceful evolution, Eastern European style.3. Violent

revolution. Faced with intensifying mass slaughter, the people possess the right to self-defense and the right to revolt.

14. Do we have the right to conflate the revolutionary essence of "systemic transformation" with the intensely romantic and cathartic impulse of revolution, equating the two? Then wield the inherent political correctness of "revolution" as a club to strike down or sweep aside those who hope for proactive reform? And when tensions escalate further, indulge in striking down or sweeping aside those who hope for peaceful evolution? Totalitarianism is intolerant and irrational; liberal democracy must take the opposite path.

15. My definition of "revolution" centers on its ultimate goal—regime transformation. Yet most current debates seem fixated on whether the means are violent. Have we been led astray by totalitarian revolutionary thinking, straying from the core of academic inquiry?

16. The "Farewell to Revolution" thesis clearly remains trapped within a "means-oriented focus," failing to address revolution's essence. Yet it reflects, from another angle, the fear and aversion to violence held by a nation long ravaged by war. When people in the early 1990s understood "revolution" in overly broad terms, this thesis possessed a certain ontological texture and one-sided depth.

17. The theory of political revolution can and should tolerate the seemingly one-sided, means-oriented "farewell to revolution" discourse. Simultaneously, in today's climate of growing public impatience and the gradual mainstreaming of liberal democracy within civil society, genuine liberalism ought to practice measured self-restraint, slightly curbing the romantic aesthetic tendencies toward means-preference within certain rights-defending factions. Excessive Byron-like passion often proves destructive.

18. Popular sovereignty represents China's greatest consensus today, while the public's yearning for change embodies its most potent sentiment. The "civil political community" must strive to build a constructive, actionable bridge between these two forces—regardless of shifting circumstances. On the inevitable path to political transformation, liberalism must compete not only with old and new leftist ideologies but also with authoritarianism and Putinism.

19. Sentiment often heralds future societal shifts. The emotional unrest

of the disenfranchised and the intellectuals' lament that reform is dead both carry profound significance. Yet genuine political transformation stems not only from the middle class and grassroots pushing for change but also from the elite's weariness with the old rules of the game. The collective force inevitably includes the contributions of less "aesthetic," less "pure" reformers, entrepreneurs, and opportunists.

20. The true forces of Chinese history often lie beneath the surface. The extent to which forces within the system have embraced liberal democratic ideals is beyond the scope of outsiders' speculation. To dismiss the possibility of proactive reform—that is, orderly political transformation—under nationwide pressure seems rather arbitrary. History often defies our expectations. Yet any orderly political reform must align with the prevailing trend of popular sovereignty; otherwise, it will inevitably catalyze avoidable social upheaval.

21. Will the ultimate transition occur between orderly reform and peaceful evolution, or between peaceful evolution and violent revolution? Based on currently available information, it seems impossible to make a clear judgment. Are thinkers who favor order and abhor bloodshed destined to become a gloriously isolated minority? Regardless, the Buddhist principles of great compassion, great tolerance, offering a way out for all, and achieving grand reconciliation by renouncing retaliation hold sublime moral value.

In the first stage of political transition, civil forces need not pursue "grand integration."

How should civil forces expand before and after the transition? To address this, we might employ "reverse engineering."

Political transitions within centralized pyramid structures offer multiple possibilities. Yet even under the most favorable scenario for civil forces, the pyramid cannot shatter into fragments. Instead, it would fragment into seven or eight smaller pyramids (albeit imperfectly shaped), with municipal and grassroots administrative order remaining stable. At this stage, even if civil forces achieve the most extensive and intensive consolidation, they cannot rival these smaller pyramids. Consequently, they lack first-rate bargaining power and can only play a supporting role in the struggles of higher echelons. The independent development of civil forces is the red line determining the survival of the democratic rights movement.

Thus, we must painfully acknowledge that in the first stage of China's political transition, even if we take immense risks, shoulder major responsibilities, and achieve a "grand integration" of grassroots forces, it will not be decisive.

Over the past four decades, China's democracy movement has witnessed four major peaks: the 1979 Democracy Wall Movement, the 1989 student protests, the 1998 party-formation efforts, and the 2003 rights defense movement. These events gave rise to at least four enduring, exceptional, and distinct vanguard groups. Moreover, as a vast nation, China's independent civil society boasts an exceptionally diverse array of free-thinking academic schools. Consequently, during the first stage of political transition, China's political society will inevitably undergo a transitional period marked by intense competition among numerous parties—potentially exceeding ten in number. The drive to compete and prevail is a healthy and positive human instinct; without free competition and the survival of the fittest, no one will ultimately accept the outcome wholeheartedly. Following a period of intense multiparty competition, the

gradual consolidation and simplification of these numerous parties into either an American-style two-party system or a French-German-style multiparty system with dual dominance aligns more closely with the natural order of democratic movements.

If we attempt to advance this historical task prematurely to the present day, setting aside the fact that "grand consolidation" would offer an opportunity for unchecked authoritarian forces to sweep everything under one umbrella, even within the independent civil sector alone, such consolidation carries a high risk of triggering intense infighting and unfair competition among advocates of liberal ideals. The result would not be the early flourishing of civil society, but rather its premature decline and withering before it could fully blossom. Therefore, in the first stage of political transition, civil forces do not require "grand consolidation." Such consolidation at this juncture would violate the natural rhythm of vigorous competition and repeated reshuffling.

Independent civil activists, brimming with passion and numerous heroes behind bars, naturally yearn to ascend to the political stage early, showcase their talents, and contribute to China's constitutional democracy. However, in the first stage of China's political transition, when independent civil forces remain weak and lack a solid social foundation, pursuing high office could prove a tremendous misfortune for these groups, tempered by four decades of hardship. During Russia's 1980s democratic movement, the pro-democracy faction prematurely seized central power by aligning with Yeltsin. Long adrift in elite politics, they failed to root themselves in civil society, fully engage in local elections, or make the historic transition to local autonomy. Consequently, they lost the opportunity to take root on Russian soil. This represents one of the deep-seated reasons Russia ultimately descended into Putin's authoritarian rule.

Rather than preoccupying ourselves with internal power struggles within the civil sector or the capital's power games during the transitional period, why not return wholeheartedly to the Chinese mainland? Why not shift our focus to civil society, local autonomy, and institutional design? This is the fundamental source of China's independent civil history—the very foundation upon which a mature party-based political system will be built. Action—taking the most crucial steps toward democratic politics—will

always outweigh the empty power struggles that float like balloons in the sky.

After my release in August 2019, I once shared three pieces of advice with Xu Zhiyong and Ding Jiaxi, two courageous democratic heroes currently imprisoned: "Speak to those below, not above; proceed slowly rather than hastily; embrace dispersion over centralization." In intellectual and academic discourse, we have always maintained a free and healthy exchange of views. For a considerable period following future political transformation, China's democracy and rights movement—and indeed its entire political society—may grapple with a fundamental choice regarding party frameworks: Should China establish parties resembling Taiwan's moderately centralized system, or adopt the fully flat, club-like structure of American parties? Personally, I believe we should proceed slowly but steadfastly to establish a club-style party system akin to the U.S. Republican and Democratic parties—one with no internal procedural centralization, thereby eliminating improper power struggles. On this issue, I am fully prepared to remain a "minority voice" for the long haul.

China's culture of liberal democracy should place greater emphasis on "civilized means."

Democratic heroes like Professor Xu Zhangrun have courageously spoken out in succession during China's turbulent first half of this year, making immense contributions to advancing the nation's political awakening. Recently, the bizarre spectacle of the morally upright Professor Xu Zhangrun being falsely accused of "prostitution" and "expulsion" has unfolded. This reflects how "certain parties," unable to navigate the sophisticated strategic games of the "professional era" with their limited intellect, are descending into the sordid depths of base human ethics—a development that is truly contemptible.

Political struggles require restraint; certain absolute red lines must be strictly observed. If one can descend into boundless depravity for any purpose or immediate need, then the perpetrator will become a severe victim of unpredictable future circumstances. "Leave a margin everywhere, and democracy will find its way." "Let matters rest unresolved." Many imagined dangers never materialize, while greater perils arise from your own overreaction and compounding one mistake with ten more." Those wielding power set the rules, while the public responds according to circumstances. Treat me with humanity and civility, and I shall reciprocate in kind; but if you descend without limit and refuse to stop, I will follow Confucius's teaching to "repay grievances with justice."

Xu Zhangrun and others who are criticizing political leaders are exercising their fundamental rights as Chinese citizens. The right to public criticism is one of the primary ways sovereign citizens hold public servants accountable. Moreover, this is a traditional custom and customary right of the Chinese people. We cannot equate the "literary inquisitions" of the Manchu Qing Dynasty—which imposed 268 years of foreign enslavement—with authentic Chinese tradition. As early as the flourishing Tang and Song dynasties, our ancestors enjoyed a degree of procedural and non-procedural political rights to criticize emperors and high officials. How much more so

today, when the era of "the empire as a family fiefdom" has long ended and popular sovereignty has become a universal consensus? When it comes to criticism, today's political leaders and high-ranking officials must tolerate it—they have no choice. Moreover, they should embrace it with the reverent attitude of a servant toward a master.

In criticizing political leaders for the sake of justice, the Chinese people should inherit and promote the cultural tradition of valuing straightforwardness and frank speech. On the broad path of constitutional democracy, we should further expand rights and explore greater spaces of freedom. However, when it comes to the personal privacy of any individual—including political leaders—the Chinese people's right to free speech seems to require some restraint, in accordance with the Confucian customs of "gentleness, kindness, respect, frugality, and humility."

This is not merely about "avoiding mention of the revered in the present age" when it comes to personal privacy! In this great era where every individual is a sovereign, it is about "preserving the dignity and avoiding mention of every citizen," mutually "yielding" to each citizen's personal privacy—in a true era of the rule of law, every citizen's private space should be a sacred and inviolable castle. I firmly maintain that we must exercise the utmost legal and moral restraint regarding personal privacy—not only for political leaders, but for any ordinary citizen, any public figure, including one's political rivals. Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of publication are universally recognized as the "fourth right" within the constitutional framework. They can be called the foremost political rights of individual citizens, forming the foundation of all political rights and even safeguarding many personal rights and economic freedoms. These rights must be fully realized. However, the exercise of these rights is bound not only by universal constraints but also by adjustments to national customs and traditions. I strongly oppose any citizen in any region of China using the personal privacy of political leaders, political opponents, political candidates, entrepreneurs, artists, or actors as subjects for public publication, dissemination, defamation, or fabrication. On this matter, I am a staunch conservative rooted in Confucian and Taoist traditions, holding a clear-cut position: provided it does not harm others, and interpersonal disputes are resolved through civilized procedures, society should embrace complete

openness, allowing all citizens to enjoy the most extensive and expansive personal freedoms, individual rights, and autonomous lifestyles. Why meddle in others' private lives?

Jefferson stands among the great statesmen I deeply admire for his excellence in both practice and theory. This includes not only his declaration of "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence, but also his advocacy for states' rights, grassroots autonomy, and the concept of a "constitutional republic." In my view, these ideas formed one of the primary theoretical foundations driving the evolution of the U.S. presidency from indirect election to unprecedented direct popular election. Such ideals have become spiritual assets for all humanity. Yet during his 1800 presidential campaign against Adams, Jefferson first commissioned notoriously malicious journalists to publish smear articles in newspapers. Then, during their public debates, he suddenly launched into vicious, derogatory tirades. Adams was stunned and immediately retaliated in kind, thereby inaugurating a disgraceful tradition of mutual smearing and verbal abuse in political campaigns that has persisted worldwide for two centuries. Some scholars argue that this serves as an effective means to compel political figures to be transparent and accountable for their actions beforehand, and indeed, this is partially true. However, presidential or prime ministerial campaigns in many Western nations increasingly focus on mutual demonization, grandstanding, and televised spectacles. This blurs truth from fiction, shrouding everything in suspicion while severely shifting the core political focus away from what sovereign citizens most need to know: candidates' policy platforms, personal decisiveness, and moral character.

Chinese Confucianism reveres the noble gentleman's contest, where "one yields the seat and then drinks." The campaign styles of Taiwan's Ma Ying-jeou and Tsai Ing-wen exemplify this noble demeanor. In my view, future candidates for public office and parliamentary seats in China must embody the fundamental expectations our compatriots hold for political figures—noble and elegant gentlemen and ladies. Future political campaigns in China must undergo rigorous public examinations (scoring may be omitted, with sovereign voters assessing candidates internally) and multiple rounds of debates focusing on policy platforms and decision-making capabilities. This ensures sovereign voters receive the most comprehensive

information possible before making informed choices. China's future political campaign culture should synthesize the best systems and operational strengths from civilized nations worldwide, while uniquely embodying the spirit and essence of our nation as a "land of propriety."Legislation must strictly prohibit all forms of campaign tactics that violate the virtues of "gentleness, kindness, respect, frugality, and humility" and the graceful demeanor of gentlemen and ladies. This includes vulgar, malicious, and low-brow attacks, vicious name-calling that tears apart relationships, baseless slander, and any methods designed to create suspicion or smear opponents. We must demonstrate to hundreds of millions of sovereign citizens that it is two or more noble and elegant gentlemen and ladies—true public servant candidates—who solemnly and thoroughly present their political platforms and promote their leadership capabilities. Moreover, every aspect of China's constitutional democracy must be governed by the "civilized methods" of this new "nation of etiquette."

A key reason for the growing momentum of China's democracy and rights defense movement since 2003 is that its primary activists never engage in vicious competition. While conflicts and misunderstandings inevitably arise among us, we have never resorted to public mudslinging or defamation. Many disputes and manifestations of "human nature's darker side" have gradually been resolved through self-moral evolution or "voting with our feet."We are all mainstream, civilized gentlemen of the Central Plains. Within our movement, an unspoken code of conduct prevails: we absolutely reject the philosophy that "the ends justify the means." Anyone found resorting to such tactics is inevitably shunned or held in contempt. I believe this code of conduct can be further refined into a conscious moral principle: steadfastly upholding ethical boundaries while actively pursuing "civilized means." In my view, "civilized means" should not only become a fundamental ethical rule within China's democracy and rights protection movement, but also a basic ethical principle for all citizens in the future constitutional democracy.

Pioneers always establish rules through action. The restraint or indulgence of this generation standing at history's crossroads may profoundly shape the next two centuries. Given this immense responsibility, independent civil society must commit to pioneering a noble, virtuous, and

conscience-driven way of life. Toward the authorities, we can adopt a stance of "persuasion while observing." Toward ourselves, we might embrace a new form of noble public morality—"civilized means"—to self-regulate and self-motivate, allowing our spiritual character to continually ascend toward nobler realms. During my travels across the nation, I've been heartened to observe that civic circles everywhere are home to such civilized gentlemen possessing powerful moral presence. From them, I've learned many virtues, ideas, and ways of conducting oneself that are rich in substance. The future political hope of China lies not only in the compassionate and principled individuals engaged in frontline exploration, but also in the active citizens of civil society everywhere who are attempting to exercise freedom, democracy, cultural autonomy, and self-strengthening.

August 9, 2020

China's democratic rights movement may ultimately fail in history unless...

Constitutional democracy is destined to prevail—this is the inevitable course dictated by the laws of heaven and nature. Yet this generation of freedom fighters in China is not guaranteed victory. Should they commit and persist in certain fatal strategic errors concerning survival, these idealists of liberty may well become the ultimate losers in the real-world political arena.

Since 2003, a democratic rights movement adhering to a moderate centrist approach has emerged in mainland China. Through countless acts of courageous resistance and tragic sacrifice, it has expanded with great difficulty. Currently, thousands of freedom-seeking patriots remain detained or imprisoned. This grim reality demonstrates that after over four decades of incremental progress, China's democratic movement has grown in scale but not in strength.

In human history, the British Chartist Movement of 1836–1848 bears striking similarities to today's Chinese democracy and rights defense movement.

The British Chartist Movement, with universal suffrage as its primary political goal, mobilized on a scale far exceeding that of today's Chinese democracy and rights movement. However, the movement's principal activists committed numerous strategic and tactical errors. The most fundamental and fatal mistake lay in their intense and dogmatically polarized thinking. Adopting a stance of rupture that bordered on a (reverse) "caste system," they resolutely excluded reformist forces from the aristocratic class, which dominated British political life, from joining the Chartist movement. This decision squandered a historic opportunity to expand from outside the system into its inner workings, and to move from the margins to the center. Consequently, the Chartist movement remained firmly confined to the margins by the ruling aristocracy, growing weaker with each struggle until it ultimately faded into historical obscurity. Following the complete failure of grassroots political movements, Britain's aristocracy started anew,

incubating and driving the electoral reforms of 1867. Yet this historic opportunity for change was squandered for nearly two decades, delaying the political rise of the common people by nearly forty years. The decline of the British Empire was not unrelated to this.

Transforming the "monopoly of power" into "popular sovereignty" and shifting from a "state-dominated society" to a "society-dominated state" constitute the fundamental theme of China's political transformation. Many well-intentioned individuals recognize only the competitive nature of political contests under constitutional democracy, failing to deeply consider that such competition fundamentally relies on all participants sharing a fair and just political platform. In peaceful modern industrial nations, this platform can only be realistically constructed through the collective building of national consensus, a meta-constitution, and civilized rules of engagement by all classes.

Class struggle and the relentless confrontation between officials and the public are by no means viable paths to achieving constitutional democracy in China's context. Forging a cross-class alliance through a grand compromise between officials and the people to establish a constitutional democratic platform shared by all is a non-negotiable benchmark in the Chinese nation's journey toward modern political civilization. It is also the political test this generation of freedom-minded idealists must pass. Should they fail this test, a generation of benevolent and principled individuals risks being swept aside by the turbulent tides of history, forced to switch to low-risk intellectual enlightenment or retreat to secluded mountains to write memoirs.

A literary romanticism steeped in polarized thinking has long circulated in popular discourse. It loudly advocates a political transformation model that rejects the reformist forces within the bureaucratic class with an obsessive, caste-like exclusion. This represents an unjust, impractical, and inevitably marginalized operational approach. These literary romantics, inheriting the French and Russian philosophy of "all or nothing" and storm-and-stress radicalism, have long hidden safely "on the other side of the river." advocating various "paper-perfect" positions of extreme rupture while relentlessly attacking the balanced pragmatism, moderate rationality, and measured approach of those struggling on "this side of the river" and their

practical allies—all to elevate themselves at others' expense. That such armchair theorists, content to watch the fire from afar, could deceive so many netizens for so long is truly a peculiar phenomenon within China's democracy movement. In a sense, they owe gratitude to the ideological confinement of post-totalitarianism for its "indirect support" through one-sided information.

The blind optimism that assumes the authoritarian pyramid will inevitably collapse, leaving civil society to tidy up the mess, is nothing more than the daydreams of cowardly idlers. The power struggle follows its own harsh logic. If moral values cannot be transformed into political strength, they will likely remain confined to the realms of spiritual culture and the tragic art of life. The historical transformation of an independent great power is always fraught with uncertainty and multiple possibilities. A fundamental principle of management theory holds that when confronting a foggy future, decision-makers must not focus solely on scenarios that appear most advantageous to them, nor should they stake everything on outcomes with low probability.

August 4, 2020

Liberal idealists do not rule out seeking a grand compromise with both moderates and hardliners

Choosing between a "grand compromise between officials and the people" and a "deadlock between officials and the people" marks a fundamental political divide in China's democratization.

In today's peaceful, highly industrialized China, pursuing a "grand compromise between the government and the people" is truly the choice that aligns with the genuine will of hundreds of millions of sovereign citizens. The vast populace seeks stability, fears chaos, and yearns for a peaceful, happy life. This conservatism is our natural survival instinct and one of the fundamental constraints driving China's democratization. Over the years, as hundreds have charged to the forefront of the struggle for freedom and democracy, they have often glanced back only to find no large masses following behind. "We've been left behind!" If we truly respect the sovereign will of the mainstream populace, we must inevitably slow our pace and "conserve" alongside the mainstream.

Generally, opposing sides seek mutual compromise because they need each other, gaining what they lack through concession. Consider the comparative resources of officials versus citizens: China's bureaucracy possesses administrative resources, managerial talent capable of sustaining rapid economic growth, and experience in exercising comprehensive political control. If we sincerely pursue the peaceful, high-quality establishment of genuine constitutional democracy and a "welfare state" in China, we cannot afford to disregard the bureaucracy that has long occupied these positions. China's democracy and rights defense movement possesses moral and ethical resources rarely seen in human history over the past three centuries, along with extensive experience in social movement struggles and accumulated expertise in political theory. It thus occupies a pivotal position in China's future trajectory that no agent of change can bypass. Rebuilding such a level of professional democratic political force would similarly require over forty years of cumulative development.

According to textbooks on transition politics, the driving force of transformation should be an alliance between moderate forces within civil society and within the system, providing the substantive foundation for democratization. But what if hardliners within the system resolutely obstruct and sabotage this process? What if the strength of the hardliners within the system outweighs that of the moderates?

My long-considered concept of a "Grand Compromise between Officials and the People" is grounded in the principle of embracing all compatriots through humanitarian values and civilized tolerance (our inherent kindness and well-intentioned ideals need little elaboration). Simultaneously, it seeks to substantially increase the probability of successful democratization. What distinguishes my approach is this: I contend that China's democracy and rights movement should not only seek a "grand compromise" with moderate factions within the system, but also not rule out achieving such a compromise with hardliners—even with seemingly ultra-leftist, rigidly reactionary factions. The overarching premise of such a compromise is the acknowledgment and adherence to popular sovereignty. Political transformation may proceed slowly, but each step must be genuinely substantive. Under ironclad trust, long-term mutual support and mutual assurance must be maintained—this represents the utmost goodwill and should also embody the highest strategic wisdom.

The "grand compromise between officials and the people" has nothing to do with reformism. When ancient Greece and Rome established their democratic republics, the "grand compromise between officials and the people" was an indispensable historical phase. Compromise ascended to the highest operational principle starting with the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention. To this day, political compromise remains a fundamental survival strategy and primary preference in American politics. If one must resort to dogmatic language like "reform" versus "revolution," the "grand compromise between officials and the people" represents a Glorious Revolution, a peaceful revolution.

For rulers already scorched by the raging flames of upheaval, a Glorious Revolution or peaceful revolution may be the best ladder to a safe landing from the precipice. In contemporary China, internal economic crises are intensifying layer by layer, the multi-polar fragmentation at the apex of

the power pyramid has largely solidified, and the latent trend of joint containment by the West has become irreversible. At this juncture, the ultra-left's old refrain has effectively run its course. Seeking "adaptation through change" has become an objective survival strategy for the rigidly reactionary faction. Constrained by insurmountable limitations, they face only two rational options: feigned reform or genuine reform?

The support offered by Western liberal democracies to China's democratic cause is invaluable. Yet as an independent major power—an economic behemoth whose industrial scale now surpasses the combined output of the United States, Japan, and Germany—China's democratic journey cannot be forced by external pressure. This remains a fundamental political truism.

Responding to external and internal pressures in a civilized, sophisticated, and constructive manner—relying on our own strength, our compatriots, and the diverse forces emerging from both civil society and within the system—is the tangible driving force for advancing democratization in China's current reality. This involves achieving a grand compromise between officials and the public, encompassing both moderate and hardline factions. In support of China's democratic cause, independent civil forces are undoubtedly composed mostly of active citizens. Yet people often overlook that administrative officials—who share our natural emotions and cultural traditions and refuse to waste their lives—can also generate vast numbers of courageous citizens actively driving political transformation. This represents a massive reservoir of political talent.

Does the bureaucratic class possess a strong motivation to pursue a historic grand compromise with civil society? I believe there is no need to speculate about the hardliners' intentions; one need only observe their fundamental survival strategies during major crises. The turbulent events of the first half of 2020 have demonstrated that hardliners exhibit a high degree of rationality in their survival strategies, though their incompetence persists, as they continue to botch major affairs.The current heavy domestic and international pressures are objective and inescapable. The diversification and even fragmentation at the apex of the totalitarian pyramid are equally irreversible. Given that any subsequent choice for democratization would place today's hardliners in an extremely disadvantageous and passive

position, from a game-theoretic perspective, positioning for the medium- to long-term future represents a highly rational survival strategy for the hardliners. This is dictated by the objective dynamics of pluralistic competition, not subjective preference. Even if the rigid, regressive faction exerts maximum effort, it can at best control the overall future for three to five years—it cannot possibly dominate the next decade or two. Do today's Chinese hardliners or seemingly ultra-leftist, rigidly regressive factions lack the rationality to protect themselves?

Past attempts by pioneers both domestically and abroad to pursue government-public reconciliation, negotiations, and roundtable discussions have failed. Yet these failures do not, by any means, prove that a "grand compromise between government and people" is unworkable. For those actually steering the process, success always hinges on the art of execution, which lies entirely in the hands of the implementers.

In a great nation, talent abounds, yet no single independent civilian can represent the whole populace. The credibility of commitments made by ten to thirty elected representatives remains profoundly inadequate. Thus, a "grand compromise" between government and people in a major power, involving whole-to-whole negotiations, is virtually unworkable. The optimal approach is to "let some people compromise first," enabling partial agreements—or even individual pacts—to be reached separately and incrementally. This relies on personal integrity, ironclad credibility, and the purity of ideals.

August 5, 2020

Part Four

Human Rights Struggle

December 1: I Was Illegally Summoned for 8 Hours

Around 11 a.m. in 2012, I received a call informing me that four cases of liquor sent to me by Mr. Sun Dawu, a renowned private entrepreneur from Hebei Province, had arrived. I went downstairs to receive the delivery, but was stopped at the northern iron gate of the residential compound by two officers from the Tianhe District Police Bureau. They initially blocked the gate to prevent my exit. I repeatedly protested that their actions constituted a severe violation of my personal rights. After about ten minutes, the officers consulted their superior at the Guangzhou State Security Bureau and ceased their obstruction. I exited the gate, with the officers tailing me closely.

After collecting the wine, I attempted to hail a taxi to leave. The two officers surrounded me. A standoff ensued for half an hour, during which no taxi arrived. Acting on instructions from the Municipal State Security Bureau, the officers claimed they were verbally summoning me and transporting me in a police vehicle to the Linhexi Police Station.

During the interrogation, I demanded that the officers state the reason for the summons. They initially claimed, "Someone reported this liquor is counterfeit." Ten minutes into the questioning, they left for lunch. Upon returning, they changed the summons reason to "suspicion of disturbing public order."After the interrogation concluded, I demanded that the officers record my actual response to the question "Why did you come to Linhe Police Station?" in the statement. They replied, "I write the statement. I write what I want and omit what I don't. I guide the narrative." Video evidence of this exchange exists.

The interrogation concluded at 8:30 PM. Before leaving, I demanded the summons document and transcript from the officers, but they refused. I told them: "By refusing to provide any legal documents or records, I deem your actions to be criminal gang behavior that severely violates a citizen's personal rights."

During my eight hours at the police station, I undertook a hunger and thirst strike. Having consumed neither food nor water from 8:30 PM the

previous day until 8:30 PM that day, I had effectively gone without sustenance for 24 hours. Upon returning home, I felt slightly unsteady on my feet. Wearing only a shirt when I went out to pick up the alcohol, I felt quite cold during the eight-hour interrogation at the station. Since August this year, I have been illegally summoned by the police three times, each time resorting to a hunger and thirst strike. This constitutes a forceful protest against the police trampling on legal procedures and severely violating my personal rights.

The underlying reasons behind the Guangzhou State Security Bureau's orchestration of these illegal summonses are:

1. Over the past two days, an academic symposium on the abolition of the death penalty, attended by lawyers nationwide, was held in Conghua, a suburb of Guangzhou. It concluded yesterday afternoon. I had planned to go there last night to meet with old friends. The police decided to intervene today, determined to prevent me from going to Conghua. They could accuse me of selling counterfeit alcohol or claim I was suspected of disturbing public order—they would find some reason to justify it.

2. Through officers from the Tianhe District Police Station present at the scene, State Security conveyed that recent domestic rumors suggest "new people are coming to change the regime." They aim to use their suppression of me to demonstrate the "truth" to the public. I anticipate they may resort to severe measures against me, as this would likely send a message to the populace.

3. State security routinely employs severe, criminal tactics against domestic democracy and rights activists—house arrest, "inviting for tea," forced "vacations"—grossly violating citizens' rights. Few resist openly nationwide. My consistent refusal to accept this infuriates them, prompting this crackdown. They warned they'll repeatedly summon me without cause or fabricate reasons. This clearly borders on a power struggle—perhaps aiming to set some world record.

The officer involved was a thoughtful young man, yet he treated me most harshly. After entering the station, he searched me despite my repeated protests and pleas for restraint. This stemmed from my posting his on-site remarks on Weibo: "Whether it's bad law or good law, it doesn't work here." "The more the law is trampled, the faster China's democratic progress will

be." Many netizens praised his profound insights. Yet these two posts may have provoked his hostility. Human nature is profoundly complex. I informed him that if I wrote about this later, I would certainly expose more of his words that he sought to conceal. I harbored no ill will, but felt his remarks were representative of police nationwide and warranted disclosure. Though he evaded me (a trait inversely proportional to his arrogance), I had already noted his badge number—though I saw no need to publish it.

Over the past four months, I've been illegally summoned three times, illegally intercepted or forced into police vehicles on three occasions. Yet I've never written articles recounting the details afterward. Primarily because, during my five years in prison, I endured countless tortures and beatings. My spirit has grown weary, leaving me numb to these summonses, surveillance, police escorts, and psychological torment—having seen the depths of the sea, other waters pale in comparison. However, considering that my passive behavior might embolden state security and local police to abuse illegal tactics even more brazenly (for instance, yesterday a police officer claimed I dare not expose them because I fear a second prison sentence, fearing another ten or eight years—ha, if I were afraid, I wouldn't persist in advancing the rights defense movement!), and it might also hinder the dissemination of resistance information and technical know-how to young people newly joining the wave of freedom, preventing them from becoming more courageous and skilled in the future—even surpassing us—I have decided to begin writing authentic on-the-ground reports and in-depth analyses from this day forward.

This piece merely outlines yesterday's unlawful summons. Within three to five days, I will publish detailed accounts and in-depth background analysis.

Thanks, friends!

Written December 2, 2012

Prosecution of Guangzhou Tianhe District Detention Center

Guo Feixiong, a rights activist detained at Guangzhou Tianhe District Detention Center on charges of "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order," has filed an administrative lawsuit against the detention center. He challenges the practice of forcing detainees to strip naked during routine security checks, demanding the court declare the defendant's actions unlawful and permanently prohibit the use of this degrading security procedure.

Administrative Complaint

Plaintiff: Yang Maodong, also known as Guo Feixiong, male, born August 2, 1966, ID number 420102196608026318, Han ethnicity, university education, registered residence at No. 8 Xinjiangda Road, Hanyang District, Wuhan City, Hubei Province. Currently detained in Cell C110 of Guangzhou Tianhe District Detention Center on charges of assembling a crowd to disrupt public order (charges are manifestly unfounded).

Defendant: Guangzhou Tianhe District Detention Center, Address: No. 5 Compound, Shangshe, Tangxia, Tianhe District, Guangzhou City, Responsible Officer: Warden, Phone: 020-85660731

Case Basis: Violation of Detention Facility Administrative Management

Petition:

To declare unlawful the defendant's practice of forcing detainees to strip naked during routine security inspections on March 25 and April 28, 2015;

Require the defendant to permanently abandon the use of strip searches as a security inspection method that humiliates human dignity.

Facts and Grounds:

The plaintiff was detained in Cell C110 at the Guangzhou Tianhe District Detention Center on charges of "assembling a crowd to disrupt public order" (a charge clearly unfounded). On March 25 and April 28, 2015, during routine security inspections, the defendant's police officers compelled

detainees to strip naked for humiliating inspections. This degrading inspection method severely violates the law and is entirely unjustifiable.

To uphold the dignity of the law, protect the personal dignity of the plaintiff and other detainees, and prevent the defendant from continuing to use this unlawful and degrading method for security inspections, this lawsuit is hereby filed. We request the court to accept this case in accordance with the law, render a lawful judgment, and support the plaintiff's claims. (Detailed grounds for the lawsuit are provided in the attachment "Guo Feixiong: Why I Am Suing the Detention Center").

Sincerely,

Guangzhou Tianhe District People's Court

Plaintiff: Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)

Attorney: Zhang Lei (Signed)

Tel: 13910707905

June 23, 2015

Attachment:

One copy of the Indictment issued by the Tianhe District People's Procuratorate of Guangzhou City to verify the plaintiff's identity;

One copy of the meeting record between Attorney Chen Jinxue and Sun Desheng, proving that the defendant committed the alleged illegal acts;

One copy of the complaint document filed by Attorney Li Jinxing on behalf of the plaintiff, proving that the defendant committed the alleged illegal acts;

One Evidence Retrieval Application requesting the court to obtain surveillance footage from the defendant's detention cell to prove the alleged illegal acts (the plaintiff has already requested the defendant to preserve the relevant footage);

One original Power of Attorney, one original Letter of Introduction from the law firm, and one photocopy of the attorney's license.

Application for Production of Evidence

Guangzhou Tianhe District Court:

In the case of Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong) v. Tianhe District

Detention Center, regarding administrative violations in detention center supervision, the defendant's illegal acts are corroborated by surveillance footage from the detention cell. As neither the plaintiff nor his representative can directly obtain the surveillance footage retained by the defendant, we hereby request that the court obtain it lawfully.

Applicant: Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)

Attorney: Zhang Lei (Signature)

June 23, 2015

Why I Am Suing the Detention Center

— Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)

To seek justice for all detainees at Tianhe Detention Center who have repeatedly endured the humiliation of being stripped naked during routine security checks.

Human dignity is the proof of the nobility of human beings as spiritual beings, a spiritual necessity that takes precedence over food and even military forces. Therefore, no matter what expedient considerations may exist, they cannot justify one person humiliating another's dignity.

Security checks before boarding an airplane are far more critical than those in detention centers or prisons, yet they never resort to the severe humiliation of stripping individuals naked. Even if most detainees in detention centers are suspects awaiting trial, the dignity of convicted prisoners in detention centers and prisons must not be trampled upon. "Condemn their crimes, but protect their dignity" is a fundamental civilized norm that all public officials representing society's law enforcement must adhere to.

During my early days in Tianhe Detention Center, my heart would tighten at every routine inspection. Though the police treated me relatively civilly, witnessing fellow inmates stripped down to their underwear and humiliated made me feel profoundly ashamed of myself. Having endured a 25-day hunger strike upon admission and being forcibly denied lawyer visits for the first three months, I was unable to immediately pursue legal recourse to defend my rights. I spent months patiently persuading then-warden Lin and Officer Zhang, who oversaw Cell C110, to change these practices. Both

officers were relatively civil and well-intentioned; they accepted my suggestions and implemented the changes. Later, Instructor Li of the detention center affirmed this approach and specifically instructed Officer Zhen: C110 and certain cells should implement differentiated management, eliminating full-body strip searches during security checks. However, my suggestion to extend this measure institution-wide remained unanswered.

Yet this small "human rights improvement" was brutally overturned on March 25 by Officer Zhen and two other Ward B officers. Their acts of stripping and humiliating detainees in Cell C110—particularly the sexual humiliation inflicted on the defiant Old Wu—have now been exposed. On the surface, this appears to be the uncontrolled behavior of a few "troublemaker" police officers entrenched in their territory and relying on force to maintain authority. Yet anyone with common sense knows that such severe human rights violations by police are all too common in China. While not universal, countless secondary instruments of violence in China have become uncontrolled or semi-uncontrolled, not only relative to civilian officials but also relative to the sovereign people. How many officers insist on demonstrating their authority by threatening or using violence against citizens—humiliating, beating, or oppressing them? For these officers, infected by the dual viruses of power and violence, trapped in the perverse pleasure of inflicting harm to assert dominance, expecting them to respect human rights is like trying to snatch food from a tiger's mouth. Observe how detention center officers immediately switch channels whenever CCTV-1 broadcasts news about judicial reforms or the exoneration of wrongfully convicted individuals. Such instinctive resistance to human rights and rule-of-law discourse among grassroots officers makes attempting to advance a nation governed by law through the bureaucratic system akin to "climbing a tree to catch fish."

"Rights" are fundamentally a verb. Their real-world manifestation is defined by the active exercise of rights and the vigorous defense of rights after they are violated. Especially for citizens who have only obtained rights on paper during this transitional period, unless they undertake a massive wave of concrete legal actions to defend their rights—using force to compel official power to withdraw from the long-occupied space of popular rights, and teaching it respect for citizens' rights through repeated instances of

"playing with fire and getting burned"—then citizens' paper rights will never be transformed into real, tangible rights on the ground.

To protect civil rights and curb official power, begin by having citizens sue officials. Exhaust the legal potential of citizen-official lawsuits to the fullest. Against the second violent apparatus that abuses force and operates on the fringes of legality—severely infringing upon ordinary citizens' personal safety and freedom—and against thuggish or bully-like police who wantonly trample the most basic dignity of citizens, it is especially crucial to wield the weapon of law at all times.

Employing human rights and rule-of-law measures to help Chinese society eliminate its violent tendencies is one of the most effective ways, under current circumstances, to demonstrate the goodwill, constructive spirit, and operational capability of liberal democrats.

June 2015

State Compensation Claim

Guo Feixiong, a rights activist detained in Tianhe District Detention Center, Guangzhou, on charges of "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order," suffered abuse during pre-trial conferences and two court hearings while being escorted by Tianhe District Court bailiffs. He was subjected to black hooding, handcuffs applied behind his back, and shackled. The excessive tightness of the handcuffs and shackles caused physical injury and left lasting complications. Guo Feixiong therefore files this state compensation claim, demanding: 1. An apology for the deliberate abuse and injury inflicted by the court officers; 2. Legal punishment for the officers responsible for the abuse and injury, along with a commitment that such officers will not abuse any escorted detainees; 3. Provide medical treatment for the claimant and compensate for mental distress in accordance with the law.

State Compensation Claim Form

Claimant (Victim): Yang Maodong, also known as Guo Feixiong, male, born August 2, 1966, ID number 420102196608026318, Han ethnicity, university education, registered residence at No. 8 Xinjiangda Road, Hanyang District, Wuhan City, Hubei Province. Currently detained in Cell C110 of Tianhe District Detention Center, Guangzhou City, on charges of assembling a crowd to disrupt public order (charges are clearly unfounded).

Compensating Authority: Guangzhou Tianhe District People's Court

Compensation Demands:

Apologize for the intentional abuse and injury inflicted by the judicial police officers.

Punish the judicial police officers responsible for the abuse and injury in accordance with the law, and prohibit them from abusing any detained individuals;

Provide medical treatment for the claimant's injuries and compensate

for mental distress in accordance with the law.

Facts and Grounds:

The claimant was detained at the Tianhe District Detention Center in Guangzhou on charges of allegedly assembling a crowd to disrupt public order. The case was heard by the Tianhe District People's Court. Due to participation in a pre-trial conference and two court sessions, the claimant was escorted by bailiffs of the Guangzhou Tianhe District People's Court on three occasions—August 1, September 12, and November 28, 2014—between the Guangzhou Tianhe District Detention Center and the Tianhe District Court. During each of these three escorts, the claimant suffered abuse at the hands of the responsible bailiffs. The methods included forcing them to wear black hoods, handcuffing them behind their backs, and shackling their feet. The handcuffs and shackles were deliberately fastened extremely tightly, compressing the claimants' blood vessels and nerves in their hands and feet. Each time resulted in redness, swelling, and visible marks from the restraints. Particularly, the tight shackles caused localized numbness in the claimant's left ankle, which has not recovered to this day.

The badge numbers of the bailiffs responsible for the above abuses are as follows: August 1, 2014: XY00692, FJ441151, FJ441152; September 12: 44110231, 44113491; November 28: XY11225, 44110231, 44111267, 44113493.

The above acts of abuse and their resulting injuries are documented by photographs taken at the time and stored in the duty room computer of the Tianhe District Detention Center in Guangzhou City, as requested by the claimant.

To uphold the dignity of the law and protect the claimant's personal dignity and bodily rights, this state compensation claim is hereby filed in accordance with the law. The obligated compensation authority is requested to provide compensation as required by law. (Detailed rationale is provided in the attachment: "Guo Feixiong: Why I Am Suing Eight Bailiffs of the Tianhe Court").

Sincerely,

Guangzhou Tianhe District People's Court

Claimant: Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)

Attorney: Zhang Lei (Signed)

Tel: 13910707905
June 23, 2015

Attachment:

Copy of Tianhe District Procuratorate's Indictment certifying the plaintiff's identity;

Legal documents authorizing Attorney Zhang Xuezhong to file a complaint on behalf of the claimant against court bailiffs for abuse, proving the facts of abuse by Tianhe Court bailiffs;

Photographs of the claimant's injuries resulting from abuse, currently stored on the computer in the duty room of Tianhe District Detention Center, proving the facts of abuse by Tianhe Court bailiffs;

Guo Feixiong: Why I Am Suing Eight Bailiffs of Tianhe Court;

One original copy each of the attorney authorization letter, law firm introduction letter, and attorney license.

Why I Am Suing Eight Bailiffs of Tianhe District Court

— Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)

Because these eight bailiffs forcibly placed a black hood over my head during the three court sessions on August 1, September 12, and November 28, 2014, repeatedly and severely violating my personal dignity. Moreover, they humiliated me by handcuffing me behind my back each time, deliberately tightening the handcuffs and leg irons so they dug into my flesh, causing extensive bloody abrasions and deep pressure marks on my wrists and ankles. Photographs taken on those days document all this (stored on the detention center duty room computer). The torment from the leg irons also caused a small area of nerve paralysis on the front of my left foot, lasting for three months. This physical, and especially mental, torment has indeed inflicted immense psychological suffering upon me. A scholar may be killed but not disgraced. As a human rights defender and advocate for freedom and democracy, I have been unable to safeguard even my most basic human dignity. My anger is profound and uncontrollable.

Power worship under totalitarian regimes has poisoned countless souls.

Without real constraints or barriers, power evolves from capriciousness into utter recklessness. Even the smallest authority is exercised to its absolute limit. These eight bailiffs, much like the Nazi SS taking perverse pleasure in brutalizing Jews, seized every opportunity to humiliate and torment me, a "heretic" advocating for freedom and democracy. They are merely a microcosm of this oppressive machine society, where officials routinely harass and bully the populace.

Through relentless and persistent legal action, I will hold these eight bailiffs accountable. As long as such scoundrels—who brazenly boast, "The court only summons me because I don't understand the law," and remain unrepentant—continue to infest China's judicial institutions, ordinary citizens will have no genuine dignity or human rights protections. The only language the authorities truly understand is the power of citizens demonstrated through proactive, procedural, or remedial legal actions.

Attached are the badge numbers of the eight bailiffs:

August 1, 2014: XY00692, FJ441151, FJ441152

September 12: 44110231, 44113491

November 28: XY11225, 44110231, 44111267, 44113493

June 2015

Part Five

Open Appeal

Urgent Open Letter to Premier Li Keqiang and Minister Zhao Kezhi

Mr. Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council
Mr. Zhao Kezhi, Minister of Public Security
Dear Public Servants,

I am Yang Maodong, a Chinese citizen, writing under the pen name Guo Feixiong.

I am writing this urgent open letter to request your assistance with a matter of critical importance within your respective jurisdictions.

My wife, Zhang Qing, resides in Maryland, USA. Today (January 9, U.S. time), she underwent major open surgery to remove colorectal cancer with liver metastasis. Forced to relocate to the United States in 2009 because our two children could not attend school normally in China, she has struggled for over a decade in a foreign land, raising our children through immense hardship. Separated for long periods from me—a prisoner of conscience who has served two prison terms—she endured profound psychological anguish and chronic depression, ultimately developing this serious illness. As her husband, I am filled with profound guilt and sorrow.

Now she is alone in America. After major surgery, she urgently needs recuperation and care, yet there is no one to cook for her, look after her, or support her. This is highly detrimental to suppressing and curing her illness. It fills me with burning worry, and each day feels like an eternity!

I must immediately travel to the United States to do everything in my power to care for my wife and help her through the most dangerous and difficult period of her life.

However, my passport has been detained by the Guangzhou Municipal Public Security Bureau in Guangdong Province. Moreover, as they claimed last year, exercising my fundamental right as a citizen to travel abroad requires their approval.

As public servants who are also husbands, you surely share the common human capacity for empathy and compassion. Equally important, you and the government departments you represent bear the duty to serve the significant legitimate needs of Chinese citizens and the obligation to promptly correct serious derelictions of duty by subordinates.

Hereby, I earnestly request that you both take time to fulfill your responsibilities, exercise your authority in accordance with natural justice and human decency, assist me in resolving this significant and urgent difficulty, order the First Division of the Guangzhou Municipal Public Security Bureau of Guangdong Province to return my passport at the earliest possible time, and refrain from any unlawful obstruction.

Should this be done, I would be profoundly grateful.

We are fellow Chinese citizens, naturally inclined to love our families, our nation, and humanity. Freedom, democracy, fairness, justice, peace, and development represent the shared consensus of all Chinese people today. I sincerely hope to see both of you, as well as all conscientious members of the Chinese government, make more robust procedural advances for China's human rights cause in the new year, ensuring that every citizen's freedom to travel abroad and other fundamental freedoms are effectively safeguarded.

I look forward to your response.

Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong)

Contact Person and Phone Number: Yang Maoping (my sister), 13872829152

January 10, 2021

Urgent Appeal to China's Highest Leaders

President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang, Chairman Li Zhanshu

Distinguished Public Servants:

I am Yang Maodong, a citizen of the People's Republic of China, writing under the pen name Guo Feixiong. As a freedom advocate and human rights worker dedicated to advancing constitutional reform in China, I am compelled to publicly petition you and appeal for urgent intervention. This follows the sudden emergence of a humanitarian crisis and the fatal obstruction of my self-rescue efforts—both of which violate my constitutional right to petition, as guaranteed by Article 41 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China.

Here's the situation: My wife, Zhang Qing, moved to the United States in 2009 and currently resides in Maryland. On January 9th of this year, she underwent major open surgery to remove colorectal cancer with liver metastases. According to the hospital's plan, she must immediately begin 24 weeks of continuous chemotherapy, a treatment carrying immense risk and posing a high threat to her life. I must travel to the United States immediately to provide the utmost care and help her navigate this most perilous and challenging phase of her life. My wife's ordeal has caused me excruciating heartache; every day of delay feels like mental torture. As public servants who are also husbands yourselves, you surely possess the empathy and compassion common to all people. You should be able to imagine and understand this agonizing pain I am enduring.

I have always held out hope for your humanity and conscience. For this reason, I publicly appealed to you at the earliest opportunity to extend assistance, allowing me to travel to the United States to care for my most respected and beloved wife—a matter widely reported in the media. Yet what caught me completely off guard was the inhumane interception of my journey to care for my beloved wife, ordered by a handful of officials at the Ministry of Public Security. Yesterday at noon, two state security officers

from Guangzhou Municipal Public Security Bureau's Division One informed me in person that the Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department and the Guangzhou Municipal Public Security Bureau had approved my departure. They did not wish to act against humanity. But the Ministry of Public Security responded with disapproval. If I were to purchase my own ticket and proceed to the airport, the Ministry of Public Security would issue orders to have me intercepted there.

This is no empty threat—it's a real operation. Plainclothes officers from the Ministry of Public Security have already been deployed below my residence, including those who closely followed me for days after my release from prison. This morning, I purchased a ticket for a flight departing Guangzhou for Washington, D.C., on January 28th at 4:50 PM. Sure enough, I encountered the anticipated "manipulation": at 2:28 PM, the booking agency Ctrip suddenly rescheduled my Guangzhou-to-Shanghai flight to the following day, January 29th. This forced me to miss tomorrow's January 28th evening flight from Shanghai to Washington. Such flagrant disregard for the law and arbitrary breach of commercial contracts occurs in today's China, where leaders repeatedly pledge to build a "nation and society governed by law." It is shocking and deeply distressing that Ministry of Public Security officials wield absolute power, using privileges beyond the law or violent threats to compel commercial entities to commit serious illegal acts—even obstructing citizens at life-or-death moments.

My wife awaits my arrival day and night, yet I cannot reach her side in time. My heart is filled with profound guilt and unbearable sorrow. Though we have long been separated by distance, our marriage is built on deep affection and mutual respect—a lifelong partnership bound by eternal devotion. She has given me everything; now it is my turn to give her everything. I will overcome every obstacle, traverse every fiery ordeal, and spare no effort. Should I be unable to board my scheduled flight from Shanghai to Washington on the evening of January 28, 2021, I will immediately commence an indefinite hunger strike.

No unjust force can stop me—this requires no future proof, as my history of struggle, especially my years behind bars, stands as ample testimony. Yet even so, I refuse to abandon hope for empathy and compassion from you, public servants. For the sake of life, for the sake of

my beloved, and also for the sake of China's image of civilization and benevolence, I hereby, as a Chinese citizen, urgently appeal to you once again: Please fulfill your duties according to the law, intervene immediately and urgently, revoke the relevant directives issued by a few lawless officials within the Ministry of Public Security, remove all obstacles, and allow me to proceed smoothly to the United States to care for my gravely ill wife. Not a single day should be delayed. Do not create any more man-made humanitarian tragedies. Otherwise, remember: no man is an island. The inhumane ordeal I endure today could befall anyone—you, me, him, and our descendants. History abounds with such examples. I implore you, public servants, to ponder this deeply.

May all public servants make tangible contributions to the cause of human rights and the rule of law in the new year, serving the billions of sovereign citizens of China!

Citizen of the People's Republic of China: Yang Maodong

January 27, 2021

With burning concern

"I Have a Word for the Premier"

In accordance with relevant domestic regulations and procedures, I have submitted the following message through the official "I Have a Word for the Premier" channel on the WeChat "State Council Client" regarding my urgent need to travel abroad to care for my critically ill wife.

I am Yang Maodong, a Chinese citizen, also known by my pen name Guo Feixiong. My wife, Zhang Qing, was diagnosed with advanced colorectal cancer in Maryland, USA, in early 2021. She underwent open surgery to remove an intestinal obstruction. In early November, she suffered a second sudden intestinal obstruction. On November 27, she was rushed to a local hospital for emergency treatment. Due to the cancer cells having spread throughout her body, the local hospital deemed further surgery ineffective and only provided palliative care via tube insertion. My wife now faces an immediate threat to her life and urgently requires my immediate presence to transfer her to another hospital for life-saving surgery.

As my residence is in Tianhe District, Guangzhou, my exit procedures fall under the jurisdiction of the Guangzhou Public Security Bureau. According to an officer from Division One of the Guangzhou Public Security Bureau, the responsible official at the Ministry of Public Security had already signed the approval in mid-August. In November, both the Guangzhou Public Security Bureau and the Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department completed their approval processes. Yet, for reasons unknown, the Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department resubmitted the relevant materials to the Ministry of Public Security for a second review. It is also unclear why the Ministry of Public Security has yet to issue a final approval for my second exit application!

Public servants have a duty to "be loyal to the people, serve the people wholeheartedly, and accept supervision by the people" (Article 14 of the Civil Servant Law). The safety of people's lives is the foremost priority for both individuals and the nation; saving lives is the most urgent matter in the world.

Hereby, I earnestly appeal to Premier Li Keqiang to intervene promptly in accordance with the law and fundamental humanity. I urge him to direct responsible officials at the Ministry of Public Security to either abandon this unnecessary second final approval or expedite the final approval in accordance with the law. This would enable me to travel to the United States as soon as possible to accompany my wife and save her life.

I have always held deep respect for Premier Li Keqiang, who has consistently demonstrated self-discipline and dedication to public service, and have repeatedly written articles praising him. At this critical moment, I sincerely hope Premier Li Keqiang will fulfill his duties, decisively cut through bureaucratic formalities, and perform this act of kindness to save a life.

I would be profoundly grateful for any assistance.

Yang Maodong

November 29, 2021

Part Six

Appendix

You Are Defending Human Dignity with Your Life
— Defense Statement for Guo Feixiong's Case

Attorney Li Jinxing

Presiding Judge Zheng Xin of Tianhe Court, Associate Judge Luo Cheng, Associate Judge Lu Xiao:

Prosecutors Wang Yu and Liu Lijun of Tianhe District People's Procuratorate:

And all citizens present in the gallery:

Today in this courtroom, every person present is choosing their place in history. For the charges brought against Guo Feixiong today will, in years to come, be proven a historical farce and a profound disgrace.

Yet this trial holds profound value and significance. It demonstrates through judicial proceedings just how difficult it is to uphold human dignity and what immense sacrifices must be made to secure basic human rights. Today, we are writing history. Among those inscribing this page in China's history are Mr. Yang Maodong, Mr. Sun Desheng, and the defendant in this case. It is they who, at the cost of their freedom and even their lives, drive society's arduous progress.

Regrettably, the prosecuting attorney violated basic professional integrity, betrayed the fundamental ethics of representing this nation in public prosecution, and disregarded elementary principles of crime and punishment. He brought charges against Mr. Guo Feixiong and Mr. Sun Desheng, solemnly declaring in court that they had committed the so-called "crime of assembling a crowd to disrupt public order."

Particularly shocking was the conduct of Presiding Judge Zheng Xin, who bulldozed through the trial with tank-like brutality. He disregarded the defendants' right to rest, ignored their hunger, and failed to recognize their extreme exhaustion, conducting proceedings from morning until the early hours of the morning. The proceedings revealed that the court not only failed to protect the defendants' rights but also flagrantly violated them. It forcibly

terminated the defendants' self-defense, ordered court officers to seize their defense materials, brazenly revoked their right to final statements, and interrupted the defendants and their defense attorneys nearly a thousand times. All these actions demonstrate that this court has nothing to do with the law.

Mr. Yang Maodong and Mr. Sun Desheng, seated in the dock today, are innocent.

This is a case about constitutional rights, not some charge of assembling a crowd to disrupt public order!

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China guarantees fundamental political rights to its citizens. These rights include freedom of assembly, procession, demonstration, association, belief, and publication, as well as the right to supervise and criticize the government. In this case, whether it concerns the alleged "Southern Weekly incident" or the "Eight Cities Flash Mob," it is clear that the defendants and other citizens were exercising these very rights. These actions demonstrate that they are the masters of this country; they demonstrate their love for this country; they demonstrate their concern for this country; they demonstrate their responsibility toward this country. Yet tragically, it is precisely these actions that have brought them to the dock to face today's unlawful trial.

The following fundamental principles are enshrined in our nation's Constitution and represent a consensus accurately understood by every citizen, including the defendants in this case. These principles are intimately connected to this case—indeed, they constitute the very essence of this case:

Constitutional rights—the fundamental political rights outlined above—are explicitly enshrined in the Constitution and universally applicable to every citizen of this nation. At the very least, in terms of constitutional rights, this country permits no untouchables. Every citizen living in this nation has the right to bask in the light of the Constitution. It is a self-evident truth that no one shall be declared guilty for exercising constitutional rights.

Constitutional rights—the aforementioned rights—must be exercised. They embody the living spirit of law, the living force of law. A constitution that cannot be exercised is no constitution at all; only a constitution that is exercised is a true constitution. No one may be declared guilty for exercising

these rights—this too is self-evident political ethics.

Constitutional rights must be believed in—that is, the aforementioned rights must be believed in by all, from the heart. They are genuine rights, a power springing from the innermost source. No one may infer that the Constitution is false propaganda, including all judicial personnel. Especially, no one may pay lip service to guaranteeing the Constitution's implementation while despicably obstructing the people's belief in and practice of the Constitution. Therefore, constitutional rights must be comprehensively and rigorously protected by law and must not be effectively deprived. This is the state's public commitment to its citizens. Without such a commitment, the state ceases to exist and has no reason to exist.

Yet in this courtroom today, you have overturned all of this. The prosecutor has charged all normal, rational, and harmonious expressions of opinion as "gathering to disrupt public order." The essence of this trial is unmistakably to demonstrate and declare: in present-day China, exercising constitutional rights constitutes a crime.

This case particularly concerns citizens' right to oversee and criticize the government. Across civilized nations worldwide, citizens actively and fearlessly monitor and critique their governments. This is precisely why we have clean, efficient governments and humble, diligent officials. The people's exercise of oversight and criticism is a fundamental element of a nation governed by law. Just as praise without criticism is meaningless, public power without oversight inevitably harms the nation, society, and civil rights. The Southern Weekly incident similarly stemmed from authorities' gross mishandling of the newspaper's 2013 New Year editorial. This provoked journalists' resistance, public backlash, online attention, and even flower offerings and solidarity demonstrations outside Southern Media's headquarters—all legitimate expressions of criticism toward the government. Similarly, the "Eight-City Flash Mob" protests stemmed from public confusion over the State Council's signing of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights without timely ratification by the National People's Congress. Without explanation from relevant authorities, citizens remained in the dark. Their flash mobs displaying banners were unambiguously legitimate expressions of criticism. Similarly, demands for officials to disclose their assets stem from rampant corruption, where

officials routinely amass tons of cash, dozens of kilograms of gold bars, and dozens or even hundreds of properties, leaving the public stunned. Holding banners to demand asset disclosure is likewise an expression of criticism. If our government were to engage in open dialogue and accept criticism—such as the Southern Weekly's New Year's editorial incident—or if the NPC provided reasonable explanations for temporarily withholding ratification of the convention, or if the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection readily accepted advice and immediately implemented public disclosure of officials' assets, the people would undoubtedly cheer them on. But if, as in this case, Mr. Yang Maodong and Mr. Sun Desheng are arrested and tried for expressing criticism, the people cannot help but ask: Why must criticizing the government in China inevitably come at such a high cost? Tragically, throughout Chinese history, genuine dialogue between officials and the people has been rare. Dynastic changes invariably came at a high cost, with uprisings, violent revolts, and even bloodshed. Yet Yang Maodong and Sun Desheng, upholding ideals of rationality and nonviolence, sought to open channels for dialogue between officials and the people. They aimed to promote stable and peaceful social development, thereby fostering greater national stability, clearer governance, and happier lives for the people. As they candidly stated in court, they never wished for national chaos, but rather hoped for better societal development. This compels us to ask: Why must such exemplary citizens be prosecuted? If we fail to genuinely protect citizens' rights and humbly heed public opinion, will our rule of law not remain a hollow facade, forever missing its essence? How then can our generation account for this to future generations?

Therefore, this is not a court. Today's court lacks the most fundamental spirit of law. As Mr. Yang Maodong's defense counsel, I solemnly declare: I bear no real or historical responsibility for anything that occurs in this court today. All present and historical responsibility for this case rests solely with Presiding Judge Zheng Xin, Associate Judges Luo Cheng and Lu Xiao, Prosecutors Wang Yu and Liu Lijun, and all other officials who determined this case.

This is a case of pure and simple political persecution.

Like this case, accusations and trials conducted without the fundamental spirit of the rule of law constitute political persecution. This has rendered it

nearly impossible for this defense counsel to mount a legal defense. The evidence presented does not constitute a crime and is so transparent that even a three-year-old child could see through it. Conscience tells us we cannot commit despicable acts in the name of the law.

We must especially not use criminal law to destroy the Constitution. As is well known, the Constitution is the supreme law of this nation and the cornerstone of its existence. The civil rights that form the shining chapters of the Constitution are the concrete manifestations of these cornerstones. Without these cornerstones, the grand edifice of the Constitution would collapse in a thunderous crash. Without the practice of constitutional rights, our Constitution is nothing but a hollow shell. And today, this court is using criminal law to destroy the Constitution!

Therefore, every legal professional must defend it with their life and blood. When the edifice of the Constitution collapses, every citizen in our society will suffer at the hands of power—a runaway beast that devours everything until it consumes itself. During the Cultural Revolution, from the President of the nation to ordinary citizens, all suffered the ravages of this demonic beast. The blood of yesterday has barely dried, yet how quickly the people of today choose to forget!

Mr. Yang Maodong and Mr. Sun Desheng, who stand in the dock today, are two pillars desperately using their own flesh and blood to reinforce the foundation of the Constitution. They are so rational, so composed, so unapologetically devoted in their beliefs, so open and unreserved in expressing their love for this nation. Through their actions, they advance the implementation of the Constitution, uphold its authority, awaken its dormant provisions, and proclaim that the Constitution is a living force. What crime have they committed?

Our courts must never serve as instruments of political persecution. This court today cannot disregard judicial justice and human conscience to become an instrument of political persecution. None of us can betray humanity, betray truth, blindly follow power, aid tyranny, or invert right and wrong.

Regardless of how false and contradictory the prosecution's testimony may be, even if every piece of evidence presented in court today were true, Yang Maodong and Sun Desheng would fundamentally not constitute any

crime. The very charge of "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order" represents an intolerable abuse of judicial power—a modern-day "groundless accusation."

Mr. Yang Maodong and Mr. Sun Desheng harbored no criminal intent. They peacefully expressed support to Southern Weekly journalists, peacefully demanded that the National People's Congress ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and peacefully called for officials to disclose their assets. Each of these actions is essential for advancing national progress. When we discuss what constitutes constructive interaction between officials and citizens, we mean precisely this. This is precisely what we mean by a sense of ownership. All evidence demonstrates that their actions were restrained, orderly, moderate, and rational. Subjectively, they harbored no intent to disrupt public order—how can they be convicted?

Examining the behavioral factors, this case also shows no disruption of public order. As video footage from the Southern Weekly incident reveals, the atmosphere outside the Southern Media Group headquarters was friendly and harmonious. People stood along the street, expressing their views in a pleasant, relaxed manner, with no trace of tension. The police present appeared relaxed, neither attempting to stop the actions nor showing any intent to disperse the crowd, demonstrating a highly harmonious police-citizen relationship. Where, pray tell, is there any trace of public order being disrupted? As for the "Statement of Circumstances" issued by the Southern Weekly Group afterward, it fails to meet the legal requirements for evidence under the Criminal Procedure Law, is untruthful, and has even become the subject of widespread ridicule. At best, it will be remembered as the greatest scandal in journalism history. If such evidence is accepted by the court, the court itself will be equally discredited.

The "Eight-City Flash Mob" initiative was conceived to unfurl banners swiftly, take photographs, and depart from iconic landmarks in cities such as Yueyang. The locations chosen for banner displays were primarily parks with sparse crowds, some being scenic areas with minimal foot traffic. Where was the "public order disturbance" when no such order existed in these places?

Regarding the content of the expressions, whether it was supporting

Southern Weekly journalists during the Southern Weekly incident or demanding that the National People's Congress ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and require officials to disclose their assets during the Eight-City Flash Mob, all were lawful, reasonable, and justified, containing no illegal elements whatsoever. The prosecutor's self-deceptive claim that this case bears no relation to the content of the expressions—that it has nothing to do with demanding ratification of the Covenant or requiring officials to disclose their assets—only exposes the prosecutor's desperate attempts to cover up the political persecution at the heart of this case. Following the prosecutor's logic that this case is unrelated to the content of the expression, does this mean that grandmothers dancing with red silk ribbons in the square at night are also seriously disrupting public order? This shows how absurd the prosecutor's accusation logic is.

This case lacks any criminal social harm. Whether the Southern Weekly incident or the flash mobs in eight cities, both the form and content were entirely lawful. No public order was disrupted, and there was no possibility of aggravated circumstances. Therefore, this case naturally lacks criminal social harm. If harm must be identified, it lies in the case undoubtedly triggering certain sensitivities—namely, the nerves of those who view the peaceful and rational exercise of political rights by the people as a scourge, the nerves of political and class struggle, and the nerves of power's arrogance, prejudice, and self-righteousness. No harm means no crime—this is a universal principle in criminal law worldwide. Why does it stubbornly refuse to apply here?

How can this case make the people feel judicial fairness? The most crucial evidence supporting the criminal charges in this case is not the testimony riddled with lies, but precisely those fragmented, edited video clips. However, the defense must emphasize—as Attorney Zhang Lei pointed out in court—that even when viewing these edited clips that most closely resemble "gathering to disrupt order," it remains impossible to conclude that public order was disrupted, let alone severely disrupted. We repeatedly emphasized how orderly the scene appeared in the footage, how relaxed people were as they conversed, how at ease the police officers seemed, how freely the crowd moved about, and how unimpeded vehicles passed. We repeatedly explained these points, yet the collegiate bench

refused to acknowledge them in accordance with the fundamental principles of evidence admissibility.

Recalling how the panel consistently barred defense counsel from copying these video discs—openly and brazenly trampling the most explicit legal provisions, even resorting to the blatant lie in court that "this court lacks disc-burning facilities"—we understand how terrified the panel is that these discs might circulate and be seen by the public: How could such an orderly and rational scene be adjudicated as "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order"? — This reveals how well the panel judges understood the complete lack of guilt in this case!

The evidence presented in this case is not only absurd but also incomplete, with substantial exculpatory evidence deliberately concealed. Despite the investigative authorities' exhaustive efforts to gather incriminating evidence and compile charges across dozens of voluminous volumes, we can responsibly assert that no evidence demonstrates which specific individuals or entities suffered concrete, detailed harm. Even the notoriously flawed "Statement of Circumstances" issued by Southern Media Group merely vaguely claims its meetings and activities were disrupted, and its vehicle operations were affected. Yet it provides no specific meeting names, no precise activity titles, no evidence of any activity or meeting preparations, and no detailed documentation of vehicle usage. All evidence presented is ambiguous and inconclusive. The defense must ask: How did our criminal investigation standards and prosecution criteria deteriorate overnight to such a level? This is akin to accusing a defendant of murder without investigating who was killed—after all, the village committee has already certified that someone was killed. Alas! If this is not a trumped-up charge, what is it?

Moreover, our evidence—particularly the dozens of videos purportedly documenting the "crime scene" of the Southern Weekly incident—has been edited, losing its essential integrity. We cannot help but ask: Why did our investigative and prosecutorial authorities go to such lengths to edit the videos (in this case, even presenting discs containing footage as short as a few seconds!!) instead of submitting the complete, unedited original discs to the court, the defendants, and the public?

What on earth is the purpose of this?

This is not a fabricated case. Why create false impressions for the court, fabricate baseless accusations, and fear the exposure of the truth? What is the purpose of all this?

The defense counsel further wishes to draw the collegiate bench's particular attention to the fact that all acts alleged in this case are not only not prohibited by law, but are in fact encouraged and promoted by it. The spirit of the law must point toward a positive state of sound rights exercise—a state where citizens enjoy full freedom of speech, where the content and form of expression are not interfered with by law, and where the exercise of numerous political rights is protected and encouraged by law. Only in this way can the relationship between the government and the people remain harmonious. Throughout history, no victor has emerged from routinely seeking criminal punishment for the exercise of political rights.

If this case is found guilty, it will at least raise the following question among the public: Is the Constitution of China useful? Are constitutional rights all fake? Is the Constitution a deception?

The people would also ask: Didn't the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee call for governing the country according to law? Isn't the core of governing according to law safeguarding and expanding citizens' political rights?

The people might also ask: If even demanding asset disclosure leads to imprisonment, does this not blatantly encourage officials to engage in corruption with impunity? If citizens lack even this right, what remains of our constitutional rights?

The people will also ask: If even moderate individuals like Yang Maodong and Sun Desheng are sentenced, what about those corrupt officials whose exposed misdeeds leave people speechless? those who fabricate false cases at will, those who abuse their power without restraint, those who demolish thousands of homes, destroy tens of thousands of acres of farmland, drive people to petition the government, become displaced, flee their homes, and even resort to self-immolation—what punishment should they face?

Yang Maodong and Sun Desheng merely embodied these principles: Citizens can speak up with dignity; citizens can stand up to speak; citizens can stand up to voice what the government dislikes; citizens need not fear

speaking what the government dislikes; citizens can return home to eat and sleep peacefully after speaking what the government dislikes, rather than living in constant dread as if facing imminent doom.

Is this peaceful, rational stance and approach not precisely what societal development requires? For the government, if there are faults, correct them; if not, strive to improve. Crucially, cease treating these reform voices through the lens of class struggle or authoritarian theory. Here lies the benchmark of our civilization!

Therefore, I call upon:

For the sake of national development and the peaceful, rational advancement of social progress, Yang Maodong and Sun Desheng must not be found guilty; To demonstrate that our commitment to the rule of law is genuine, Yang Maodong and Sun Desheng must not be convicted; To allow us to believe tomorrow will be better, not worse, Yang Maodong and Sun Desheng must not be convicted; To avoid repeating historical mistakes and creating another historical miscarriage of justice, Yang Maodong and Sun Desheng must not be convicted!

Not only are Yang Maodong and Mr. Sun Desheng innocent, but all righteous individuals throughout human history—past, present, and future—who have fought for freedom, democracy, and advocated for the people are innocent!

The long view reveals the true landscape. Given time, history will inevitably prove that today's trial of Yang Maodong and Mr. Sun Desheng is erroneous. Truth stands with Yang Maodong and Mr. Sun Desheng. Like countless historical miscarriages of justice, their case will ultimately receive history's just verdict.

This defense counsel makes the following final statement to the court:

In this case, if you choose to convict them, go ahead! But you will forever bear the shame of this decision.

But if you uphold justice and conscience to deliver a not guilty verdict, this will become boundless glory passed down through your descendants for generations!

Mr. Yang Maodong and Mr. Sun Desheng are innocent in this case, innocent in this life, and forever innocent.

Attorney Li Jinxing

November 29, 2014

The Hellish Landscape Behind Guo Feixiong's Wish

Gao Zhisheng

Guo Feixiong is about to be transferred back to prison. After visiting him, his sister relayed his wishes: "After entering prison, I demand access to books, refuse to kneel, refuse forced labor, and refuse to be beaten."He also stated that if tortured again, he would go on a hunger strike and demanded his wife "take our two children to the United Nations gate to starve themselves." He recalled that "in 2007, when Guo Feixiong first entered Meizhou Prison, guards ordered him to crouch with his head between his knees. When he refused, the guards ordered another inmate to beat him, kicking him down the stairs until he was rolling on the ground. Only when over 200 inmates present began booing did the guards intervene, warning, 'Don't kill him,' and the assailant stopped."

An innocent scholar filled with positive aspirations for his nation and people was imprisoned by this dark era—an act itself that violates conscience and humanity. Worse still, after incarceration, he was forced to kneel, subjected to forced labor, and brutally beaten.

Feixiong had endured imprisonment and torture before. These demands stemmed from his past suffering."Refusing to kneel, resisting forced labor, and avoiding beatings"—such demands would make any moral, responsible government blush with shame and provoke righteous indignation among conscientious citizens. They would trigger a chain of self-examination and redemptive action. Yet this occurred in Communist China, where appalling human rights atrocities had long become commonplace. Such matters in post-1949 China often vanish without a trace, like an arrow plunging into the sea. Prolonged helplessness breeds a terrifying capacity—an indifference to any cruelty inflicted upon others—forming a tacit, collective tolerance that reinforces and sustains the evil of authoritarian tyranny.

Hayek argued that totalitarian dictatorship is composed of murderers

and thugs. I was fully prepared for the savage evil of Communist prisons, yet only upon actually being imprisoned did I lament the limitations of human imagination.

It was a primordial wasteland where humanity and the rule of law were utterly absent. Structurally, this was the inevitable outcome of absolute power operating without oversight. Moreover, the prison system represented a systematic, specialized, and large-scale institutional design by the CCP's anti-humanitarian terror regime to strip away humanity and deliberately cultivate collective fear. Its technical foundation lay in the mandatory "reeducation rate." This forced reeducation rate served as the basis for evaluating the performance of every institution and individual within the system. Each year, rigid reeducation targets are imposed on institutions and individuals. These hard metrics determine promotions, demotions, and profit margins solely on the basis of outcomes—with no substantive constraints on methods. Over time, achieving goals evolves into nothing but bloody violence. Everyone becomes an active cog in this bloody machinery, with no possibility of remaining untouched.

What left the deepest impression on me in Chinese Communist prisons were the ancient, primitive leg irons (one dared not move all day; by the end of the first day, my ankles ached unbearably); the cold-blooded electric shock torture inflicted on prisoners; the excessive labor imposed on inmates by depriving them of Sundays; the endless meals of boiled cabbage; and the suffocating, oxygen-deprived darkness of solitary confinement cells. The most searing memory, however, is the electric shock torture and arbitrary beatings inflicted during the forced reeducation process (here, I must emphasize that these issues are by no means unique to Shaya Prison; they are purely systemic).

The arbitrary beatings of prisoners mainly occurred during unpredictable roll calls.

A series of sharp whistles, a shrill command to "fall in," and the entire building erupted with the terrifying sound of running feet. Then came the roll call, the scolding, the dragging out, and the beating. This process occurred several times a day; I could only listen. Even just listening was often terrifying at first, but eventually, I grew accustomed to it and became numb.

Barbaric political regimes throughout history share a common trait: utter ignorance of human individuality and complexity. They treat people as uniform machines, employing mechanical means to achieve uniform goals. This inevitably leads to unnecessary conflict and ultimately relies on cruel, inhumane methods.

In Chinese Communist Party prisons, all inmates, under certain circumstances, are political prisoners. Their "re-education" is broken down into hundreds of specific metrics, the foremost being unconditional support for the Four Cardinal Principles and the Communist Party's eternal leadership. Fail this single criterion, and all other efforts become utterly meaningless. Political prisoners and those convicted of "cult" offenses suffer immensely under this requirement. Another hard requirement is the mandatory confession and acceptance of the sentence. For the wrongfully imprisoned, this is a gateway to hell. It is widely understood that this reactionary judicial system produces a vast number of wrongful convictions annually, and the most terrifying nightmare for the wrongfully imprisoned unfolds within the prison walls. The first procedure during the initial three months of incarceration is the mandatory confession, a process that has cost countless wrongfully imprisoned individuals their lives.

When I first entered prison, to minimize conflict, I promised to obey their disciplinary rules without confessing guilt. But on January 4, 2012, during a routine forced sitting session, I stood up and paced rapidly in the detention cell because they were electrocuting someone again. Having experienced electric shocks myself, I knew immediately that someone was being electrocuted—the fourth time I'd heard this in over half a month of imprisonment. I expressed my protest by refusing to comply with prison regulations. They noticed. Ma Bin entered the isolation cell and asked, "Did you hear something?" "This is the fourth time I've heard it," I replied. A verbal confrontation ensued, and someone quickly called him away.

Regarding the prison's routine practice of electroshocking inmates, aside from Ward 16 Chief Ainiwar, who never admitted it, every official I confronted or reported to—including Deputy Warden Ma, Education Section Chief Kang, Prison Administration Section Chief Xu, and Criminal Enforcement Section Chief Li—remained expressionless and silent in response to my protests or reports. (Only Deputy Warden Ma, after listening

with his lower lip clenched, paused briefly before muttering, "In theory, we should follow the law." Later, Officer Gao Jianjun voiced the helplessness of frontline enforcers when he asked me, "Old Gao, the higher-ups demand a 100% rehabilitation rate. Without harsh methods, we can't meet that target. What do you suggest we do?" (I recall the exact words imperfectly, but the gist was this).

In a conversation with Section Chief Kang before my release, when he asked about my impressions of the prison, I replied: "Compared to my time in military detention, this is a better hell." The prison did not unduly harass me in any area where they had discretion. Only once, on December 21, 2011, did they order me to crouch with my head between my knees—an order I refused. At the time, I was wearing a black hood. Someone approached and tried to force me down by pressing on my shoulders, but ultimately failed. The attempt stopped when someone nearby shouted something in Uyghur. For others, crouching with heads between knees was part of daily life there.

Forced kneeling occurred several times in the CCP terror organization's private prison. To achieve their goal, they would spend hours tormenting me each time. Yet ultimately, after beating me to the ground, they would always have two men hold me down to force the kneeling posture, satisfying their base desire for a "victory."

In some respects, the CCP remains "honest." For instance, it has yet to ratify the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, refuses to enact specific laws on press freedom, and dares not establish a constitutional review mechanism. It knows exactly what it is. The same temperature yields different results for eggs and stones. If it treats its own constitution like a worn-out shoe, what good would ratifying a few international treaties do? On the other hand, does refusing to ratify relevant treaties grant a license to trample on basic human rights and dignity with impunity? As the world's most rogue regime, you may reject international conventions on political and human rights, but you cannot escape your obligations as a UN member state to uphold these standards domestically.

The Preamble of the United Nations Charter states: "Reaffirming fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person"; Article 1, Paragraph 3 stipulates: "...to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all"; Article 55, Paragraph 3

mandates the UN to "promote respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion." The abysmal state of the obligations that UN member states owe to their own people is now clear to all humanity.

A group of people who desperately oppose the rights unique to humanity do not even possess the qualifications to be called human beings, let alone be entrusted to lead a nation.

Regarding Yu Feixiong's statement that he went on a hunger strike after being imprisoned and tortured again, it is now clear that I do not support the authorities' true intentions. Protest is a phenomenon within human society and has nothing to do with beasts. I am even more opposed to the idea of "having his wife bring their two children to the United Nations gate to stage a hunger strike protest."First, this is detrimental to the children's physical and mental development. Second, today, certain Western politicians and business groups modeled after Britain and the United States have become de facto accomplices in the CCP's brutal suppression of human rights. Protesting to them is like playing the zither to a cow.

Under the premise of faithfully trusting in God, we—and only we—are the real hope for change in China. This is what we must clearly understand. The most urgent priority now is to protect ourselves and our children, seeking the connection between our hearts and God's love.

Here, I once again solemnly warn those within the CCP terrorist organization—those who can still understand human speech, aside from Xi Jinping and his clique—to consider the future of yourselves and your loved ones. Ignoring my repeated warnings will only leave you with bitter regret!

While imprisoned in a secret detention facility ordered by Zhou Yongkang, I declared to his agents: "He [Zhou] will die in prison." They sneered, "Old Gao, have you gone mad in here? That man is the Ninth Prince. Do you even understand what the Ninth Prince means? Do you believe your own words?" The outcome is now known to all. While imprisoned in Shaya Prison, I declared that Xie Hui—then Director of Xinjiang's Department of Justice and head of its Prison Administration Bureau—would inevitably face incarceration. A deputy section chief sneered at me: "Old Gao, your words only invite contempt." Yet "Comrade Leader" Xie Hui was indeed imprisoned in 2015.

On May 26, 2012, I formally submitted a written statement to prison authorities declaring that criminal members of the CCP terror organization—including Hu Jintao—would face trial by a special Chinese tribunal around late 2017. This written record stands as proof. My intent was to warn those still possessing humanity to heed their own futures. When the day finally comes that people recognize the deafening truth of these words, it will only leave the mediocre with empty regret!

February 4, 2016, in the village

Stop the Authorities' Slow Murder of Guo Feixiong

Hu Ping

The CCP authorities are carrying out a slow-motion murder of Guo Feixiong.

On the morning of April 26, Guo Feixiong's sister, Yang Maoping, visited him in prison and discovered his physical condition was extremely poor. He exhibited clear signs of serious illness: bloody stools, bleeding from the mouth, and difficulty walking or sitting steadily. He had suffered severe bleeding on April 19. Family members have repeatedly demanded that prison authorities conduct a medical examination for Guo Feixiong, but these requests have been met with harsh refusal. Two months prior, on February 29, when Yang Maoping visited Guo Feixiong, his physical condition had already deteriorated severely. He had lost weight, now only three-fifths of his former body mass, was unable to eat or sleep properly, and on several occasions could not stand up after sitting down. This situation is compounded by the fact that during his previous detention in a detention center, Guo Feixiong was denied outdoor exercise for over 2.5 years. Such prolonged, deliberate abuse cannot stem solely from the malice of individual guards; it must originate in directives from the highest levels. We have reason to conclude that the authorities are perpetrating a slow-motion murder against Guo Feixiong.

Guo Feixiong stands as an unquestionable banner of China's contemporary human rights and democracy movement. Since April 2005, he has endured four criminal detentions and two prison terms. Over eleven years, he spent three years on the front lines of rights defense and eight years behind bars. In 2005, Guo Feixiong joined the villagers' rights defense movement in Taishi Village. If we call the Taishi Village villagers' rights defense movement a milestone in China's grassroots rights defense movement, then we must acknowledge that Guo Feixiong's actions were groundbreaking. He set an example of intellectuals and grassroots activists

uniting to launch large-scale collective resistance.

In 2013, Guo Feixiong participated in street demonstrations supporting the Southern Weekly incident. He displayed political banners demanding "Press Freedom, Constitutional Democracy" and delivered formal political speeches, elevating what began as sympathy for Southern Weekly staff into comprehensive civic political demands. This transformed the street gathering into a landmark event directly advocating for freedom and democracy. Despite enduring severe torment in prison, Guo Feixiong remained courageously unyielding—a true hard man who commands profound respect. His formidable capacity for action, organizational skills, and moral courage have left such a powerful impression that many have failed to give his ideas and arguments sufficient attention. Here, I specifically recommend Guo Feixiong's defense statement and appeal brief from this trial. Both documents, totaling approximately 70,000 words, were written under harsh detention conditions. They not only thoroughly refute the authorities' baseless charges but also profoundly elucidate the significance of the rights defense movement, the principles of constitutional democracy, and their own deep motivations for engaging in political opposition. With Guo Feixiong now imprisoned and deprived of his freedom of action, it is all the more crucial that we engage with his ideas, grasp his convictions and ideals, and understand his strategic and tactical proposals, drawing moral strength from them.

Since Xi Jinping assumed power, China's human rights situation has deteriorated further. Authorities have implemented a plan dubbed the "Flag-Pulling Operation," systematically suppressing leading figures in human rights activism across all sectors. Guo Feixiong's ordeal stands as a stark example. In recent days, urgent solidarity campaigns have emerged both domestically and internationally, while international human rights organizations have issued strong protests. In Guo Feixiong's case, the authorities' baseless charges and imprisonment are egregious enough. Their deliberate abuse and torture, disregarding basic humanity, are utterly intolerable. We must mobilize further to stop the authorities' slow murder of Guo Feixiong. We demand that they immediately conduct a medical examination and grant him medical parole. This is an urgent matter that cannot wait.

May 3, 2016

Guo Feixiong: An Unwavering Practitioner of the Citizens' Movement

Wang Debang

Mr. Guo Feixiong has been criminally detained once again! This is an outcome he himself did not wish to accept. He had often told friends, "There is so much work to be done on this land!" At his age, he is not afraid of prison, but if he keeps getting arrested, it would be a tremendous waste of time. After all, so many things are waiting for him to do!

Indeed! Mr. Guo Feixiong, who dislikes imprisonment, only wishes to avoid delaying his work. Yet, in China, certain forces absolutely refuse to let him act. Thus, his desire to avoid jail to continue working and their determination to imprison him to stop him became irreconcilable contradictions. Ultimately, the power seeking to silence him outweighs his efforts to continue his work, making prison his unavoidable destination.

If hearing about Guo Feixiong's imprisonment a few years ago didn't surprise me, it's because I once viewed him as a radical who might inadvertently breach criminal law. When searching online for Guo Feixiong, I once came across an image of him holding an assault rifle in his right hand (obviously a toy), poised for battle—his warrior-like demeanor unmistakable. This image gave the impression that Feixiong had violent revolutionary tendencies. Later, when I met Feixiong, I specifically asked him why he had chosen that picture. Feixiong said it wasn't an image he posted himself; someone had photoshopped it online, and he had seen it too. It seems someone deliberately wanted to label Feixiong as a violent radical.

However, after interacting directly with Mr. Guo Feixiong, I discovered he was vastly different from the rumors circulating. In reality, Feixiong is an exceptionally gentle, rational, and law-abiding citizen. His unwavering conviction, tenacious perseverance, indomitable spirit, and down-to-earth approach leave a profound impression. His mastery of legal research and application far surpasses that of many professional lawyers (as

repeatedly noted by renowned attorney Sui Muqing). Simultaneously, Feixiong carries a profound sense of compassion for his people, shoulders immense responsibility for social order and progress, and holds deep reverence for life. That such a man is repeatedly imprisoned cannot be because he violated criminal law, but because he took action—action that certain individuals refuse to accept.

Guo Feixiong is a practitioner! Here, "practitioner" does not refer to a Buddhist monk who has renounced the world but not yet undergone tonsure, but rather to the meaning of "a person who walks, a doer" in the phrase "the practitioner knows no boundaries"—that is, someone who "rises and acts."

I first heard the name Guo Feixiong over a decade ago. I recall the series of events that followed, all linked to that name, which kept my attention fixed on this man's whereabouts. I searched online repeatedly for information about him, trying to track his movements. I discovered he had gone from Beijing to Guangzhou, from Guangzhou to Taishi Village, and finally ended up in Guangzhou Detention Center, then Liaoning Shenyang Detention Center, and ultimately Meizhou Prison. Even behind bars, Feixiong never ceased his activism. Through the scarce information that occasionally leaked out despite heavy suppression, the outside world still heard whispers of his “stirring things up” within prison walls. It seems Mr. Guo Feixiong functions like a perpetual motion machine—shuttling between cities and villages across China, his resistance proving impossible to contain even within prison confines.

What exactly is Guo Feixiong accomplishing through this relentless “walking”? Or what does he truly aim to achieve? We can discern his aspirations and actions from his past history, particularly his conduct over the last decade or so.

Guo Feixiong: Born Yang Maodong in August 1966 in Gucheng County, Hubei Province. Graduated from the Philosophy Department of East China Normal University in Shanghai in July 1988, then assigned to work at Wuhan Workers' Medical College (later merged into Jianghan University). Moved south to Guangdong in 1991, engaging in publishing, writing, and related work. He participated in the 1986 Shanghai student democracy and patriotic movement and the 1989 nationwide student democracy and

patriotic movement.

Beginning in 2003, Guo Feixiong abandoned his highly successful career as a bookseller to dedicate himself to social advocacy. Over the next two years, he tirelessly campaigned for high-profile rights defense cases with significant contemporary implications, including the Sun Dawu, Sun Zhigang, Cai Zhuohua, and Shaanbei Oilfield cases.

In late April 2005, he initiated an application in Beijing to organize an anti-Japanese May Fourth Movement protest against Japanese right-wing groups, demanding the return of the Diaoyu Islands. He was criminally detained for 15 days by the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau on suspicion of "gathering crowds to disrupt social order."

In July 2005, as legal counsel for Beijing Shengzhi Law Firm, Guo Feixiong traveled south to Guangdong Province to participate in grassroots land rights advocacy work in Sanshan, Nanhai. At the end of July, he became involved in the campaign to recall village officials in Taishi Village, Panyu District, Guangzhou. He stayed alone in a villager's home for over twenty days, providing legal consultation services to support the villagers' recall efforts. On the evening of September 13, Feixiong was criminally detained by the Panyu Public Security Bureau in Guangzhou. He subsequently engaged in a hunger strike and water strike lasting a total of 59 days. On December 27, 2005, the public prosecution authority decided not to prosecute Guo Feixiong, and he was released.

On February 3, 2006, Guo Feixiong initiated a global relay hunger strike with Beijing-based lawyers Gao Zhisheng and Fan Yafeng to protest police retaliation against rights defenders using mafia-like tactics. That year, Guo suffered multiple violent beatings by police. When Gao Zhisheng was arrested in August, Guo formed a legal support group for Gao and actively pursued rescue efforts, drawing the wrath of the CCP's Political and Legal Affairs Committee. On September 13, Guo Feixiong was criminally detained in Guangzhou on suspicion of "illegal business operations." Police accused him of illegally publishing an anti-corruption journal titled Shenyang Political Earthquake five years prior, when he was a bookseller. During interrogations in detention centers in Guangzhou and Shenyang, Guo endured various forms of torture inflicted by the special investigation team.

On November 12, 2007, the Tianhe District Court in Guangzhou found

Guo Feixiong guilty of "illegal business operations," sentencing him to five years in prison and a fine of 40,000 yuan. This sparked strong condemnation from numerous international human rights organizations, which asserted that authorities were using economic charges as a pretext for political persecution of democracy and rights activists.

On December 13, 2007, Guo Feixiong was transferred to Meizhou Prison in Guangdong Province to serve his sentence. During his incarceration, Guo initiated a series of hunger strikes and led fellow inmates in advocating for their rights, resulting in severe beatings and solitary confinement. Five years of prison torment severely damaged Guo Feixiong's health, leaving him with multiple chronic illnesses.

Mr. Guo Feixiong's tenacious efforts earned him widespread public acclaim. In December 2005, he was named one of the "People of the Year" by Hong Kong's Asia Weekly, alongside thirteen other rights defense legal workers. In December 2006, while still detained at Guangzhou No. 1 Detention Center, he was awarded the "Third Wei Jingsheng China Democracy Fighter Award" by the Wei Jingsheng Foundation. In October 2008, during his imprisonment at Meizhou Prison, he received the "2008 Beijing Spring Freedom Pioneer Award" from Beijing Spring magazine.

After his release on September 13, 2011, Guo Feixiong remained under strict surveillance by authorities. Police maintained a 24-hour watch at his residence, frequently preventing him from meeting friends and even blocking his trips to the market to buy groceries. Despite these harsh conditions, Guo actively participated in various activities aimed at fostering the growth of China's civil society and advancing human rights improvements through multiple channels. In early 2012, Guo Feixiong personally traveled to Wukan to investigate the villagers' incident of protecting their election rights. In April, he provided legal support for the Guangzhou Five Gentlemen who were detained for holding placards demanding "human rights, democracy, and public disclosure of officials' assets." In June, he joined the investigation team seeking the truth behind the mysterious death of Hunan's "June Fourth Iron Man" Li Wangyang. He later signed petitions in solidarity with Liu Ping, a democratic election participant in Xinyu, Jiangxi, who was violently assaulted.

From January 7 to 10, 2013, following the censorship of Southern

Weekly's New Year editorial, citizens spontaneously gathered outside the newspaper's Guangzhou office to show support. To prevent escalation, Guo Feixiong risked his safety by addressing the crowd outside the building. In impromptu speeches, he urged participants to remain rational and peaceful, to express their views, and to disperse promptly.The persuasive power and influence of a man who had endured years of imprisonment and various forms of torture calling for restraint, were undeniable. It was precisely through the rational guidance of Mr. Guo Feixiong and others that the solidarity protest at the Southern Weekly entrance was peacefully and smoothly resolved.

On March 3, 2013, Guo Feixiong joined several democracy and rights activists from Beijing and Guangzhou in launching a citizen petition campaign urging the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In the following months, due to health issues, he traveled to his rural hometown in mainland China for recuperation and to investigate public sentiment and aspirations. On August 17, Guo Feixiong's sister in Hubei suddenly received notification that he had been criminally detained by Baiyun District police in Guangzhou on August 8 on suspicion of "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order." This confirmed Guo Feixiong's re-imprisonment by authorities.

Reviewing Mr. Guo Feixiong's journey reveals him as a sincere patriot, an idealist committed to advancing democracy, human rights, freedom, and the rule of law in China, and an unyielding fighter willing to sacrifice himself for his ideals!

Mr. Guo Feixiong's ideals are far from mere rhetoric; they are embodied in his relentless travels across China's cities and countryside. His experiences reveal how, to guide Taishi villagers in lawful elections, he broke through layers of official blockades, infiltrated Taishi Village, and lived in farmers' homes for dozens of days. This allowed him to build genuine trust with villagers. Through deep, patient advocacy, he ensured election and rights protection laws were accepted and followed by villagers, keeping the entire rights movement peaceful, rational, and lawful. His down-to-earth approach to rights protection through the law provided invaluable experience for rural election rights protection in China and served as an excellent reference for the later Wukan incident.

After the Wukan rights defense incident broke out, Guo Feixiong repeatedly broke out of house arrest to travel to Wukan. There, he engaged with villagers, learned about their rights-defense efforts, provided legal counsel, directly observed the village elections, and used his firsthand observations to refute societal misconceptions that Chinese people are unfit for democracy because of low moral standards. Mr. Guo documented the Wukan election process directly through his blog: February 1: Voting Scene in Wukan Village (Part 1) (Part 2), and February 1: Random Notes from the Wukan Election Site. He spared no effort in advocating for the villagers' rights and the election. To this end, he engaged in debates with various media outlets that either smeared or misunderstood the Wukan rights defense election, using his firsthand, irrefutable evidence to counter arguments attacking the villagers' capacity for self-governance and the quality of their elections.

Originally an academic known for his scholarly works, Guo Feixiong faced the daunting task of China's social transformation. Observing that many in the intellectual community engaged in theoretical discourse while few took concrete action, he resolutely chose to immerse himself in rural communities, working in the fields to advance grassroots rights protection and electoral participation. On January 22, 2012, in "My Duty and My Choice," Guo reflected: "Tonight I briefly reflected on my past and contemplated my future." Each person has their strengths and aspirations. My primary focus is not human rights, livelihood issues, confrontation, or competition, but elections. Over the next decade, my main endeavor will be providing legal and social services for village, township, and county elections by engaging directly at the grassroots level. I neither oppose nor undermine other approaches or grand visions. The competition of diverse ideas and the mutual resonance of sincere actors are precisely the essence of a pluralistic, flat civic society structure. Others may have the capacity to consider the whole picture; I can only consider a part. Others may be busy with top-level design; I remain more interested in grassroots experimentation. Moving toward the grassroots, toward the common people, toward the front lines—this is my duty and my choice." In fact, this can be seen as a summary of Guo Feixiong's years of struggle.

Driven by this ideal of penetrating society's grassroots to advance

village, township, and county elections, Guo Feixiong endured immense hardship, living what could be described as an ascetic's life. He traveled tirelessly, sometimes unable to find shelter for nights on end. He would catch brief naps at stations or in public squares, or even doze off by the roadside in mountainous areas. There were times when he went without food for a day or two, subsisting on whatever edible plants he could find in fields and farmlands. Traveling alone through rural areas, Feixiong faced robbery and theft on more than one occasion. When discussing these hardships with friends, Guo Feixiong would merely smile faintly, as if recounting someone else's story.

After enduring hardships from both authorities and society, Guo Feixiong remained steadfast in his convictions, tenaciously maintaining a gentle and rational demeanor. As he wrote in his blog: "I'm often likened to 'an egg hitting a stone.' True, true—I am the egg hitting the stone. But what's wrong with being an egg? It is life itself, harming no one, bearing its burden. The more malicious you are, the more benevolent I become.The more stone-like you become, the more egg-like I become. The more tyrannical you are, the more gentle I am. O stone, stone of this world, look in the mirror—aren't you also an egg?" These words vividly capture Feixiong's spirit of gentleness, kindness, tenacity, and steadfastness—a quintessential embodiment of Chinese-style peace, rationality, and nonviolence. It can be called Feixiong's "Egg Spirit"!

It is precisely with this "egg spirit" that Feixiong tirelessly traverses China's streets, alleys, and farmlands, catalyzing the growth of China's civil society and propelling the rise of citizen rights advocacy. He measures the progress of Chinese human rights and democracy with his own footsteps. He is an unyielding practitioner in China's era of democratic transition!

September 5, 2013

Guo Feixiong: A Knightly Spirit with a Compassionate Heart

Li Xuewen

I first met Guo Feixiong on January 6, 2012, during his first visit to Beijing after his release from prison. We happened to be staying at the same teacher's home, spending over a week together day and night. We talked freely almost every night and occasionally went out to meet friends. I discovered Guo Feixiong was quite different from the image I had formed of him online. I still vividly recall his appearance then: thick, outdated glasses, a heavy cotton coat, constant coughing punctuating his speech, a rather short stature, and a serious demeanor—he resembled an ordinary rural schoolteacher. He kept a low profile at the time, rarely meeting with people in the activist circle, and was preparing to engage in some business ventures to raise tuition money for his child studying in the United States. He carried his laptop and bag everywhere, remained highly vigilant, and was reluctant to speak with strangers.

His health was poor then. Five years of imprisonment had left the once-robust Guo Feixiong with internal injuries. His trip to Beijing served two purposes: to explore livelihood opportunities and to meet old friends in person to express gratitude for their support during his incarceration. On multiple occasions, Guo Feixiong mentioned wanting to meet the poet Mangk and asked me to facilitate the connection. At the time, I couldn't understand why he was so eager to meet Mangk. To me, Mangk was an older generation poet, someone with whom we felt a significant disconnect. However, Guo Feixiong explained to me: Mangk had written articles supporting him after his arrest, and in his early publishing days, he had also funded some poetry events, maintaining deep connections within the poetry community. His trip to Beijing was specifically to visit and thank those who had spoken out on his behalf during his imprisonment. He harbored a deep connection to poetry, believing it to be the key unlocking human freedom,

and that humanism and liberalism were inextricably linked. It was then that I realized Guo Feixiong possessed a profound humanistic foundation, far from the rough-and-tumble hero image portrayed by outsiders.

To fulfill Guo Feixiong's wish to meet Mank, I contacted a friend who arranged a meeting with Mank at a café in Songzhuang. That day was the happiest and most relaxed I'd seen Guo Feixiong. We drank, ate noodles, and listened to Mangk recount the story of Today magazine and the events of 1989. When I introduced Guo Feixiong as a leader in the rights defense movement, Mangk was surprised, remarking that he hadn't imagined anyone still persisting in such work today. Though Mangk no longer remembered Guo Feixiong, Guo took it in stride, maintaining profound respect for the elder figure.

During that period, we had many late-night conversations, giving me a comprehensive understanding of his state of mind. He was optimistic about China's social development at the time, holding views contrary to many of mine. I recall him saying, "I'm puzzled why you're so pessimistic about the prospects for democracy now. Compared to five years ago, when I was imprisoned, the development of civil society is incomparably better. Back then, there were hardly any of us doing rights defense work. Now we have lawyer groups, we have Weibo, and we have many awakened citizens."I replied, "You can't just see the positive side; you must also see the negative. I admit that civil society has developed somewhat since five years ago, but the Chinese Communist Party remains extremely powerful. The comprehensive crackdown on civil society in 2011 was even more brutal than before, with many receiving heavy sentences. We must never underestimate its cruelty at any time."He replied, "I agree we must never underestimate its brutality. But we should unite with reformists within the system who seek change. The corruption within certain factions is no less than that of the Communist Party—perhaps even worse. I do not rule out uniting with reformists within the system, provided our ideals align. This is the foundation of the grand reconciliation concept I proposed after my release. Many have accused me of compromise and surrender, but I do not care. I am willing to be a perpetual minority, embracing the beauty of solitude."Once in prison, I was brutally beaten because I heard a Falun Gong believer being tortured. His agonized screams lasted a month. Unable to bear

the torment of my conscience, I protested—and was savagely beaten. I've gone on hunger strikes multiple times, the longest lasting over 60 days, during which they force-fed me. Though I sympathize with someone who was beaten last year, I will never forgive him.

Reflecting on the Taishi Village rights defense incident, he stated: "It was that event where farmers ignited my resolve. So many farmers moved me profoundly—you cannot imagine the courage and tragic grandeur of those rural women lying down in front of bulldozers to defend their rights. Their actions inspired me, making me fearless of imprisonment. Only when you are truly ignited do you gain the courage to defy death. If you're inspired, if you're moved, death ceases to matter." As Guo Feixiong spoke these words, a pure, moving light shone behind his thick glasses—a light that made it impossible to believe he was a man who had endured torture, suffered from persistent coughing, and had only recently been released from prison.

Later, after participating in several on-site citizen observation activities, I finally grasped the meaning of the "inspiration" Guo Feixiong spoke of. To me, it referred to the physical presence in resistance, the intense immersion in the scene when standing shoulder-to-shoulder with comrades, and the passion that dispels fear. This understanding came too late. By the time I truly comprehended this elder comrade, he had already been imprisoned once more, becoming a prisoner of conscience again.

Guo Feixiong exemplifies the perfect fusion of thought and action. Though many of his ideas now seem overly optimistic, even naive—such as "reformers within the Chinese government are gradually experiencing a wave of conscience uprisings, ideological conversions, and new concepts of opportunity investment" orIt can be unequivocally asserted that, just as internal divisions emerge in every era, the system inevitably harbors a significant number of pragmatic individuals who have embraced constitutional democracy. They will not remain forever silent or compromised; they will inevitably rise with the times, exert influence, and even seek to seize the initiative for change, embracing history's challenges and opportunities." At the same time, Guo Feixiong possesses an exceptionally clear-eyed understanding of the system, grounded in a strong sense of reality and presence. He once remarked: "The debate over reform, revolution, or gradual change is an outdated topic from the era of Kang

Youwei and Sun Yat-sen, or the 1920s, and holds little academic value today. The Xinhai Revolution vividly demonstrated the strong alignment among the three, both in fundamental principles and in practical implementation. For the present, a single counterexample suffices to illustrate this point: since 1998, Chinese politics has seen almost no genuine reform, but rather more regression, because totalitarianism understands that sincere political reform inevitably leads to fundamental transformation."

Guo Feixiong is above all a man of action. When he perceives an opening, he acts on his convictions—logically sound, for he is no opportunist but one who unites knowledge with practice. His defense attorney Zhang Xuezhong remarked: During our meeting, he made a remark that left a deep impression on me: 'No matter how difficult it gets, I will strive to be a person whose words and actions align.'" In contemporary China, "being a person whose words and actions align" is an extraordinarily difficult endeavor. Too many people speak grandly yet act dishonestly; too many make sweeping pronouncements from lofty heights while their true faces remain obscure and their conduct sly and cunning. Guo Feixiong is clearly not such a person. The spirit of unity between knowledge and action that he embodies has always been the rarest commodity in China. This spirit perpetuates the most luminous qualities of the ancient scholar-official tradition and continues the noble integrity demonstrated by figures like Tan Sitong and Lin Jiemin in modern times.

Within China's grassroots rights defense and dissident circles, while many friends—myself included—still disagree with some of Guo Feixiong's judgments and viewpoints, almost no one questions his character. There is near-universal recognition and respect for his unyielding integrity—a rare consensus in a civil society perpetually embroiled in debates over figures and events. This demonstrates how crucial personal integrity is for a political activist. Such character isn't built overnight but forged through prolonged sacrifice, suffering, and dedication—the result of consistent alignment of knowledge and action under brutal conditions. Like precious jade emerging from rough stone, true character is revealed only after enduring the test of time.When many lament that China lacks its own Mandela or Gandhi, they often project their longing onto foreign figures while overlooking the genuine, shining examples of integrity within their own land. To be fair, the

suffering endured by contemporary patriots like Gao Zhisheng and Guo Feixiong is no less than that faced by Mandela and Gandhi. Indeed, the totalitarian enemy we confront is more evil and utterly without scruples than the British colonialists ever were.I believe China already possesses its own Mandelas and Gandhis, and Guo Feixiong stands as the most promising candidate to become one.

There is one little-known story that must be shared. In 2012, Guo Feixiong assisted an ordinary migrant worker girl in Guangdong. This girl, named Xiaomei, suffered from lymphoma. Her family was impoverished and could not afford treatment. She sought help on Weibo for two months with little attention. Guo Feixiong happened to see her post, visited her in the hospital the next day, and decided to help this unknown, unfortunate woman. I once received a private message from him asking me to repost her Weibo, but with so many such cases happening, I only reposted it and paid no further attention. Later, our mutual friend Maoding responded to Guo Feixiong's appeal and donated 100,000 yuan. Combined with contributions from other friends, the total reached 200,000 yuan, enabling the girl to undergo surgery. Maoding also stepped in because he admired Guo Feixiong's character. Upon learning of Guo Feixiong's imprisonment, Xiaomei wept uncontrollably, unable to comprehend how such a great benefactor could face such persecution.

While Xiaomei was undergoing chemotherapy, officials from the stability maintenance department visited her in the hospital, warning her that Feixiong was a bad man and she shouldn't be fooled. Xiaomei replied: "I have a terminal illness and am penniless. I sought help from the Red Cross and civil affairs departments, but they just passed the buck—my hometown blamed my place of work, and Guangzhou blamed Guizhou."It was only through the online fundraising campaign Guo Feixiong initiated that she could afford the stem cell transplant surgery, saving her life. She declared that Guo Feixiong had given her life back and was her savior. She vowed to personally greet this benefactor upon his release from prison.

This girl was just an ordinary migrant worker. Yet in the eyes of the kind-hearted Guo Feixiong, every person is equal. When disaster strikes, humanitarian aid is needed, and he helps whoever he can. Guo Feixiong is a man of genuine compassion, utterly different from those pseudo-elites who

see themselves as the elite alone.

This is the Guo Feixiong I know—a man of chivalrous spirit and tender heart.

April 28, 2016

The Choice of Political Resistance Methods Lies Entirely with Oneself

Tan Zuoren

—The choice of political resistance methods lies entirely with the individual. It has nothing to do with power, but everything to do with rights and freedom. Even when expressing personal insights and experiences, one cannot dictate others' choices. A thousand paths lead to the summit; the moon shines equally high. Every path of resistance deserves a try, not outright rejection. Any positive effort should be met with affirmation and encouragement.

(Real-time reflections on Guo Feixiong's article: "China's Democracy and Rights Movement May Ultimately Fail in History Unless...")

Brother Feixiong possesses a broad and profound vision, his arguments weighty and robust. He eschews verbal flourishes, even appearing rough and unadorned, yet his logic carries undeniable force, piercing through the paper. Only through prolonged study, reflection, and the test of time could one arrive at such poignant insights. Bravo!

I, too, belong to the category of recluses he criticizes, self-identifying as "just coasting along, waiting to die while watching the spectacle unfold." This is no pretense—it's the truth.

The loss of fighting spirit stems not from fear, but from weariness. Our contempt for power within the system, coupled with even greater disdain for power outside it, leaves us utterly exhausted. We understand the rules of power, yearn to change or regulate the game, yet instinctively flee from it—even looking down on those who chase it. We (I) are destined to achieve nothing. Brother Feixiong is absolutely right!

But I believe success need not be achieved in my lifetime. Each generation will inevitably produce representative figures who step forward to speak, ultimately converging into the various ranks of constitutional democracy. I cheer them on.

Countless historical facts have long proven that in totalitarian states,

bottom-up social revolutions against tyranny—especially violent ones that erupt like storms—rarely achieve true democracy. They mostly usher in new totalitarianism, causing democratic regression. Revolution is not a crime; rebellion is justified. Even if theoretically sound, in reality, grand revolutions yielding pseudo-democracy are the norm (with the U.S. being the exception).

This does not mean we should abandon resistance against tyranny. Whether as individuals or groups, the pursuit of justice and the fight against injustice are inalienable, inherent human rights. The choice of political resistance methods lies entirely with the individual—it has nothing to do with power, but everything to do with rights and freedom. Even when expressing personal views and experiences, one cannot dictate others' choices. A thousand paths lead to the summit; One moon shines high above. Every path of resistance deserves a try, not prior rejection. All positive efforts deserve Active recognition and encouragement.

August 6, 2020, on the road.

An Extraordinary Citizen's Declaration: Reading Guo Feixiong's Appeal Brief

Zhang Bostu

As a courageous human rights activist, Guo Feixiong has long been known both domestically and internationally. His recent essay, "Why a Constitutional Democratic Revolution is Imperative—Guo Feixiong's Appeal Brief," further reveals the activist-thinker within. On November 27, 2015, the Tianhe District Court in Guangzhou sentenced Guo Feixiong to six years in prison on two charges: "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order" and "picking quarrels and provoking trouble."A week later, Guo Feixiong's appeal brief emerged—a voluminous document of nearly 30,000 words. Beyond refuting the absurdity of the court's verdict, a full three-quarters of the text was devoted to articulating the appellant's political stance on "Why a Constitutional Democratic Revolution is Imperative."Such an "appeal" is likely unprecedented, yet it stands as a political manifesto by a Chinese citizen under new authoritarian rule—a precious intellectual record of China's transition.

Guo pointed out that China's anti-democratic forces view constitutional democracy as a "fundamental evil." For years, they have consistently argued that constitutional democracy is a Western import incompatible with China's national conditions. Yet, when it comes to political systems, what truly constitutes "China's national conditions"?The author reviews China's long pre-modern history, arguing that "over thousands of years, the Chinese nation independently developed a centralized political system that was remarkably mature and highly advanced in the history of world political institutions. This Chinese version of centralized authority developed multiple institutional frameworks to adapt to evolving environmental demands," achieving remarkable accomplishments. Yet it consistently failed to resolve numerous fatal structural flaws: imperial autocracy grew increasingly arbitrary and expansive, undermining political equilibrium and

tilting dangerously toward absolute monarchical power, with tyranny becoming the norm;A brutal judicial system, the emperor's bloody purges of dissenters, and rampant secret police politics forged a social mechanism for resolving infringements, conflicts, and disputes through the abuse of violence and torture. This not only left people's lives, personal freedoms, and property security severely unprotected but also poisoned the populace's spirit, fostering a social custom in which both officials and commoners became violent, engaging in frenzied mutual harm.

All these factors defined the task facing modern China: it must end the autocratic imperial system and complete its modern transformation. Yet, tragically for China, despite the Xinhai Revolution establishing Asia's first democratic republic, it soon veered off course. Some radical revolutionaries followed "utopian political activists born from the Russian context—a society that had only recently shaken off the tribal rule of the Mongol Golden Horde and retained the savage spirit of the steppes." They "regarded highly centralized power and even the terror policies that abused the guillotine during the French Revolution as positive spiritual legacies." To advance their new experiment in utopianism and permanently eliminate what they perceived as the "social enslavement" of the poor by the rich, they resorted to dangerous political enslavement—dictatorial methods.This new form of utopianism did not build upon the giants of existing intellectual civilization—freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—to conduct new trials and errors. Instead, it resolutely chose an ideological path that competed antagonistically with these very values.The political ideology of absolute power and the legal philosophy that recognizes no natural justice—only the will of the strong—were fully activated. The political savagery of totalitarianism, devoid of any constraints, was meticulously justified and embellished by sophisticated philosophy. Thus, an unprecedented colossal monster—totalitarianism—was born upon the earth."

This ambiguous yet explicit passage outlines the general trajectory of 20th-century China's descent into the totalitarian trap of communist revolution. Nevertheless, the author acknowledges that "before 1956, China's version of the totalitarian utopian movement initially manifested as an egalitarian revolution with certain positive implications. It was precisely

by uniting with this revolution, compromising with it, and leading it that the regime secured national power. During the revolution, some impoverished peasants received land, establishing a form of egalitarian private land ownership reminiscent of the early years of multiple dynasties; women, who had endured multiple oppressions for millennia, achieved liberation—arguably the revolution's greatest accomplishment; The privileges of local gentry, patriarchal authority, and clan rights within traditional authoritarian culture vanished entirely. Moreover, the common people, freed from numerous forms of discrimination and constraints, gained access to opportunities for political, economic, and cultural management within the new society. However, this egalitarian revolution—which openly rejected the ideals of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—was not only impoverished and narrow in content but also lacked procedural norms and legal safeguards. In spirit, it devolved into a formalistic worship of absolute equality, its moral radiance dimmed by the bloodshed and injustice of violent land reform, the establishment of a new "caste system," and the destruction of religious freedom. After 1956, the totalitarian utopian experiment crushed the revolution, castrated the revolution, and devoured the revolution. The drive toward comprehensive collectivization of the means of production, purportedly advancing toward a "paradise on earth," destroyed private land ownership. Farmers stripped of their land instantly became virtual serfs dependent on the state as the sole "landlord." This represented an unprecedented regression in individual economic property rights in China over the preceding 2,200 years, despite being cloaked in the glittering garb of "historical progress" and "supreme ideals."The consequences were catastrophic. Private urban industries and commerce were also nationalized. Having already lost their limited economic freedoms, people now lost the support of their independent personalities, becoming existentially dependent on the Party-State.In the subsequent comprehensive organization and control of people's physical and spiritual lives, the Party-State nearly devoured all remaining rights and freedoms. Equality among individuals did indeed emerge—but it was the equality of minute cogs within a super-state machine, the reverential submission of bees before their queen or ants before their queen ant, bowing before a "demigod" wielding absolute power and the monopoly on truth. People were equally deprived of

sovereignty, human rights, and freedom; equally stripped of their noble dignity as human beings; equally plunged into poverty or destitution; and equally stripped of their living individuality."

This analysis is profound, tragic, and brimming with historical tension—far surpassing the work of so-called "scholars" engaged in "state-sponsored research" and superior to the simplistic, black-and-white critiques of some in the opposition camp.

After 1978, China's ailing society embarked on reform and opening-up. Resource ownership retreated from total public ownership to a structure of coexisting components, eventually yielding a majority share to private ownership. Centralized planning was abandoned, and a free market economy took root—effectively declaring the historic failure of this inhuman utopian experiment. With the cessation of class struggle, the abolition of the new 'caste system,' and the partial 'return of power to the people' in economic, legal, and cultural spheres, the totalitarian regime of comprehensive centralization and dictatorship transformed into a post-totalitarian system that, while somewhat moderated, still maintained comprehensive control and high-pressure governance. The author also acknowledges that this "post-totalitarian regime" was not entirely without merit. For instance, it demonstrated "relatively high administrative efficiency" during China's three decades of economic growth. However, "these practical achievements cannot obscure the inherent, severe structural flaws of the post-totalitarian system." The foremost and most fundamental issue is "the illegitimacy of the private ownership of power—The post-totalitarian regime not only usurps popular sovereignty through the Party-State's exclusive monopoly on power, depriving citizens of political rights and marginalizing them from core political life while brutally suppressing emerging political opposition. It further enshrines the 'privatization of power,' 'privatization of military authority,' and 'Party-dominated state' as inviolable, unchallengeable foundations.This inherently prevents post-totalitarian governments from establishing moral legitimacy or legitimate authorization procedures through any self-adjustment or patchwork reforms. They will forever stand on the opposite bank of the river from the masses' yearning for political sovereignty, their aspirations for a civilized and rational political life, and their need for lasting social stability. Without establishing the fundamental principles and

origins, the nation's lifeline cannot be secured. This constitutes the most profound crisis and latent danger facing the Chinese nation!

Thus, the answer to what truly constitutes "China's national conditions" becomes self-evident: "The post-totalitarian regime itself has in fact become the greatest violator of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Chinese people, and the greatest destroyer of public and national interests. This is the fundamental national condition regarding China's political system today. This very condition provides the most compelling justification for change!"

In Guo Feixiong's view, "the inherent logic of rights—that is, the fundamental principles of humanity and justice—dictates that the Chinese people will not be satisfied with a state of incomplete rights. They will inevitably strive for more comprehensive rights until they achieve the sovereign reality of complete self-determination."Only through a political revolution—one that utterly abandons the institutional wilderness and political savagery of the existing system—can a new political system be established. This new system, genuinely authorized and controlled by the people through procedural means, embodies the 'fundamental good' of modern political civilization. This represents the true will of the Chinese people and the profound mandate of heaven today." So what kind of political system can satisfy this 'fundamental good'? A constitutional democratic system. "As the 'fundamental good' of modern political civilization, a pluralistic and balanced constitutional democracy possesses pure, profound, and systematic intrinsic qualities. It provides the institutional norms and operational reference framework for China's society—which has long suffered severe violations of its political nature through abuse of power, corruption, and tyranny, and whose people now possess both the desire and capacity for substantive political transformation—to practice a political revolution. Given China's fundamental national conditions, public sentiment, customs, and historical traditions, this is a remedy precisely tailored to the ailment."

It must be said that the above exposition reflects a human rights activist's profound contemplation on the legitimacy of constitutional democracy, grounded in rights-based logic, his historical observations of China's challenges, and his own human rights practice. Guo Feixiong unequivocally affirms: Constitutional democracy is not only not an "evil,"

but precisely what contemporary China lacks most and needs most! "Building a pluralistic and balanced constitutional democratic system is to cultivate the lifeblood of the Chinese nation, to construct the fundamental source of the Chinese nation's dignity, freedom, happiness, and glory. The sovereign will of hundreds of millions of people—their rejection of totalitarian politics' bloody, tyrannical history and its present reality of abuse of power, corruption, hereditary succession, and high-pressure governance; their thirst for political rationality and institutional civilization; their widespread rise in strength and their inexhaustible life force surging toward ideals—all determine that the revolution toward a constitutional democratic system in China is inevitable."

The author proudly declares: "This generation of Chinese bears the historic mission of conducting the second democratic experiment for the Chinese nation and transforming a pluralistic, balanced constitutional democracy into an institutional reality on Chinese soil. It requires a generation of awakened citizens to demonstrate formidable moral courage, continuously launching peaceful opposition and enlightenment actions against totalitarianism to accelerate the external dissolution and internal transformation of the authoritarian camp; It requires a generation of awakened citizens to demonstrate the requisite political wisdom to rally and unite the overwhelming majority of compatriots, shifting the balance of power between opposing forces and enabling the constitutional democratic revolution through the sovereign strength of the people. It further demands that this generation unleash the imagination of freedom, synthesizing political institutions and operational wisdom from ancient and modern times, East and West, to forge a historic, original Chinese version of the constitutional democratic system." The constitutional democratic revolution is by no means a quiet, cold construction project of institutional frameworks led by a few elites. Rather, it is a process of institutional arrangement, experimentation, adaptation, consolidation, and operation—guided by the exercise of sovereignty and the realization of rights—in which the citizenry themselves actively participate and take charge. The people are both the builders of the institutional stage and the performers upon it. The people are the subjects of the system, and their rights are its soul. In the course of this political revolution, the revolution of rights among the subjects unfolds

simultaneously with the revolution of the object-like system."

Guo Feixiong candidly states that the above "is the profound motivation behind my long-term political opposition activities as a promoter of China's constitutional democracy cause. It is also the profound motivation behind my participation in the street protests supporting Southern Weekly and the 'Eight-City Flash Mob' campaign promoting the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."

This appeal is both moving and thought-provoking. Against the backdrop of China's new authoritarianism casting dark clouds over the nation and red terror devouring free spirits in nearly every corner, the intellectual cry of an activist delivers a powerful jolt to society. It not only upholds the dignity of life but also reaffirms that China is not lacking in outstanding citizens who think critically and dare to act—they are the true hope of this nation.

December 26, 2015, New Jersey

Mr. Guo Feixiong as I Knew Him

Xu Lin

Mr. Guo Feixiong is one of the few individuals I have encountered who possesses the bearing of a statesman.

Although I began opposing authoritarianism early on, I remained a solitary fighter, primarily publishing articles online with little interaction among peers. It wasn't until the latter half of 2011 that I participated in street-level rights defense and democracy activities, gradually gaining insight into the people within the circle.

In early April 2012, I was criminally detained on charges of inciting subversion of state power, followed by designated residential surveillance (i.e., secret detention). During this period, because I consistently refused to confess, interrogators brought up various matters, including whether I knew Guo Feixiong. I said I did not. Truthfully, I genuinely didn't know him. But since the interrogators mentioned him, I assumed he must be quite influential. Later, I proactively engaged the state security officer assigned to monitor me in conversation, trying to draw information out of him. This is how I learned a bit about Guo Feixiong. Naturally, the officer deliberately disparaged him, but I knew their words couldn't be trusted—I had to interpret them in reverse. This only reinforced my impression that Guo Feixiong was no ordinary person.

After my release in July, I asked colleagues in the circle about Guo Feixiong. I learned more about his advocacy work, such as the Panyu Taishi Village rights defense case. I also discovered he had just been released from prison and was under strict surveillance, making meetings difficult. So I sent him a brief text introducing myself and expressing my desire to meet. He replied, telling me to take good care of myself and to patiently await the arrival of democracy in China. Upon first reading this, I wondered: Has he lost his nerve? Given up? But then I reasoned: First, he likely didn't know me well. Second, our phones were probably tapped, making explicit statements risky. Still, his message clearly showed he remained hopeful and

steadfast in his belief that democracy would come to China. Given his own intense surveillance, he surely didn't expect democracy to fall from the sky. His call to "wait" must refer to waiting for the right moment.

My hunch was soon confirmed when we met at a citizens' dinner, which led to more direct exchanges. He struck me as steady, sincere, and well-mannered, with just the right warmth toward others. Though he rarely smiled, he radiated approachability. He never lost his temper or raised his voice, even when others argued or shouted at him. He never resorted to finger-pointing, insults, or provocative remarks, maintaining a consistently calm and refined demeanor that made it difficult for others to engage him in conflict. His voice carried quiet strength, and his bearing radiated composed confidence. As a philosophy scholar, he possesses extensive knowledge and strong logical reasoning. His words are often simple yet incisive, hitting the core of issues, and he excels at summarizing points. Some activists and street democracy advocates in his circle, with lower educational backgrounds and more assertive personalities, enjoy debating him. If, after discussion, others remain unconvinced, he would simply say, "Alright, let's discuss this further privately later," allowing gatherings to proceed smoothly.

Guo Feixiong never issued orders in a rigid or commanding tone. He simply shared his perspectives and ideas, and others often intuitively understood and acted accordingly.

A former successful bookseller, he holds books in special regard—not only reading them himself but also gifting them to others. Recognizing that many in our circle lacked formal education or, despite their education, understood little about constitutional democracy, he would give them books on these subjects and urge them to read them carefully. Once, when we passed by a bookstore, he took several of us inside for a browse and bought books for each of us. This approach proved effective; after some time, I noticed a marked improvement in the theoretical understanding of some colleagues in our circle. Later, he even organized a reading group and held several reading sessions.

Whenever Guo Feixiong was present, there seemed to be an unspoken understanding that everyone would wait for him to take the lead. Yet he didn't always act as moderator himself; sometimes he'd let others take charge, giving everyone a chance to practice and shine. His hosting style was

distinctive. He rarely stood or sat in a prominent spot, avoiding grandstanding or emotional appeals, yet he wasn't stiffly formal either. He conducted proceedings methodically, and everyone cooperated naturally. Still, I felt his presence would be even more engaging if he added a touch more wit.

I recall one evening during the Southern Weekly incident when we gathered for a dinner at a restaurant. A diverse group of prominent figures crowded around five or six tables, with several state security officers seated at a table nearby. Guo Feixiong sat discreetly in a corner, presiding over the gathering. He remarked that it was rare to have so many friends present and suggested everyone take turns introducing themselves. He also encouraged brief sharing of thoughts on the day's activities. Unlike typical gatherings, he didn't enforce Robert's Rules of Order, limiting each person to three minutes. Reflecting later, I realized this approach was wise and appropriate—it avoided the appearance of a formal meeting and prevented the state security officers from disrupting the event. When someone declared during self-introductions, "I advocate violence—I want to overthrow the Communist Party," Guo Feixiong immediately intervened. In a gentle, tolerant tone, he said, "Let's not discuss that here," then reiterated that the main purpose was to help everyone get acquainted. Such a statement was indeed highly inappropriate in that setting—it could have provoked immediate disruption by the state security agents, or even led to arrests.

Guo Feixiong never spoke about his own deeds, nor did his words carry any hint of self-aggrandizement or boasting. Instead, he actively promoted others. During the Southern Weekly incident, he told several of us, "Don't just focus on holding placards and giving speeches during the day. Though it's exhausting, you must still find time at night to write about the day's events and your reflections. This is a critical moment—online advocacy must keep pace."So I wrote an article that very night and sent it to him. He immediately found a website to publish it, as he had connections there.

In late February 2013, our group was detained for protesting North Korea's nuclear test. After our release, during a gathering, Guo Feixiong remarked in a very easygoing tone that our detention during the anti-nuclear protest should be properly documented. He noted that Xu Lin was a good writer but hadn't seen him produce anything on the matter yet. I realized this

was his way of criticizing me, though he delivered it in a way that was easy to accept. However, for certain reasons, I ultimately didn't write anything.

It is understood that Guo Feixiong suffered brutal physical persecution during his previous imprisonment, though he rarely spoke of it. At most, he would tell others that the machinery of dictatorship is extremely cruel and that one should avoid making unnecessary sacrifices. This brutal persecution did not breed simple hatred in him; instead, he consistently adopted a rational approach of nonviolent resistance.

After the 2013 Southern Weekly incident, Guo Feixiong felt the political climate had improved and believed the time was ripe to intensify his efforts. He initiated a campaign with colleagues to solicit signatures for an appeal regarding the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and planned to organize publicity efforts across various regions. I am unaware of the specifics, only that he visited several locations before being arrested. His actions embodied the essence of his first text message to me.

According to Guo Feixiong's defense lawyer Li Jinxing, Guo endured over 460 consecutive days without outdoor exercise during his detention—a brutal form of persecution. Why does this rational man persistently face such cruelty? I believe it stems from two reasons: first, his integrity and dignity irritate the ignorant guards; second, his significant influence makes the dictatorial apparatus fear and resent him, driving them to deliberately target him.

Some criticize Guo Feixiong's imprisonment as evidence of flawed judgment or strategy. I won't engage in further debate on this point. I will only say that social transformation inevitably demands sacrifice. Guo Feixiong is a courageous warrior unafraid of sacrifice. It is not that he lacks rationality or wisdom, but that the dictatorial apparatus is too evil and shameless. He once remarked with a lighthearted smile that he feared no death, adding that Xu Lin and the others shared that fearlessness. He consistently avoided elevating himself. His declaration of fearlessness demonstrated resolve and leadership, offering encouragement to others. Yet I feel I fall far short of his caliber.

This piece is difficult for me to write. I don't know if it might cause trouble for Guo Feixiong or other comrades, especially those still imprisoned. So I can only write briefly. But I believe history will remember

them.

During my detention, I once told the state security officers: "A political activist whose career remains incomplete if they've never been imprisoned." Guo Feixiong has already served multiple prison terms, making his political career remarkably rich. Yet one aspect remains unfulfilled—he has yet to apply his political talents toward building a democratic, law-based nation. I believe that day will come, and it won't be long.

November 23, 2014

A Brief Review of Guo Feixiong's Political Philosophy and Strategies for Political Revolution

Jiang Yingbin

On January 22, 2016, Guo Feixiong was sentenced to six years in prison on appeal—his second conviction after serving five years. This article reviews Guo Feixiong's self-defense statement at his first trial and his appeal brief, both to express admiration and support for him and to take this opportunity to organize my own thoughts on China's political transition.

I. Philosophical Reflections on Constitutional Democracy

Why have Western nations achieved constitutional democracy while China remains entrenched in totalitarian authoritarianism? Is constitutional democracy truly incompatible with China's national conditions? In his appeal titled "Why a Constitutional Democratic Revolution is Imperative," Guo Feixiong addresses the following points:

1. Constitutional democracy is not inherently incompatible with China's historical traditions

China certainly experienced over two millennia of imperial autocracy and centralized governance. Yet this system contained elements amenable to modernization, such as the multi-ministerial system, the Six Ministries' specialized division of labor, the censorate system, the Three Departments system, and the system of court deliberation, which achieved a certain degree of separation of powers and oversight. The imperial examination system also established a relatively fair mechanism for selecting civil service candidates, enabling some degree of political mobility and social status advancement. Moreover, prior to the Qin Dynasty, there existed an even longer tradition of feudal pluralistic politics and a pluralistic, competitive intellectual and cultural tradition. The 1911 Xinhai Revolution established Asia's first democratic system, which had its own historical roots and was not a simple transplant of Western governance. The paralysis and failure of this

democratic system stemmed partly from the persistence of imperial autocratic political genes and logic, which could not be eradicated overnight. More significantly, however, the Russian totalitarian utopian movement exploited the vacuum, gaining momentum through successive alliances with Chinese intellectual movements and peasant uprisings, ultimately prevailing in the brutal struggle for survival.

2. The structural characteristics of the post-totalitarian regime fundamentally conflict with the people's demands for rights

Guo Wen enumerated the fundamental characteristics of the Mao-era utopian totalitarian regime: (1) the privatization of military power; (2) the privatization of political power and the emergence of a privileged political class; (3) the establishment of a super-state exercising comprehensive administrative and social centralization; (4) one-man dictatorship under unlimited authority.

After 1978, China's ailing society embarked on reform and opening-up. Resource ownership retreated from total public ownership to a structure of coexisting components, eventually yielding a majority share to private ownership. The abandonment of central planning effectively declared the historic failure of this anti-human utopian experiment. The totalitarian regime of comprehensive centralization and dictatorship evolved into a slightly moderated post-totalitarian system. Yet its practical achievements cannot mask its inherent structural flaws: (1) The illegitimacy of the private ownership of power;(2) The generational decline of core leadership within the political elite; (3) The formation of a corrupt privileged class under hyper-centralization and institutional chaos; (4) Rule by lawlessness, secret police politics, and the syndrome of centralization-facilitation; (5) The absence of strategic decentralization and checks within the governmental structure.

This political system cannot achieve moral legitimacy under popular sovereignty or procedural legitimacy through authorization. It cannot construct an effective institutional cage to restrain and eradicate the abuse, arbitrariness, or even madness of power. It cannot stably and systematically equip the political management elite of the civil service corps to competently fulfill their positive duties of seeking benefits for the people, creating opportunities, mitigating risks, and pursuing long-term strategies.The post-

totalitarian regime itself has become the greatest violator of the basic rights and freedoms of the Chinese people and the greatest destroyer of public and national interests. This is the fundamental reality of China's political system today.

3. Constitutional democracy is the remedy that addresses the root causes of China's political problems

After systematically examining the ideal nature and supreme authority of written constitutions, universal suffrage under indirect democracy, separation of powers, the rule of law, federalism, and multiparty systems—the structural pillars of constitutional democracy—Guo Wen argues that this system stands in stark contrast to the totalitarian-post-totalitarian regime. The latter, propped up by violence, operates under a "one party, one ideology, one leader" model within a monolithic, top-down pyramid structure. In contrast, constitutional democracy is founded on a social base and political participation variables characterized by diversity in class, ethnic diversity, religious pluralism, cultural diversity, ideological pluralism, diverse interest groups, and a multifaceted civil society as its social foundation and variables for political participation. It is driven by the people—a force universally empowered through universal suffrage—and mediated by two or multiple parties, diverse political blocs or factions, and countless professional politicians or candidates. Its institutional framework and operational platform are characterized by the coexistence and cooperation of a flat structure encompassing central, provincial, municipal, and grassroots governments, all regulated by constitutional or legal norms. Compared to post-totalitarian regimes, constitutional democracy possesses fundamental institutional advantages in legitimacy, participation, vitality, normativity, professionalism, fairness, efficiency, stability, and long-term vision.

4. The People's Subjectivity and Sovereignty in Constitutional Democracy

The constitutional democratic revolution is by no means a project of institutional framework construction led by a small elite. The people are both the builders of the institutional stage and the performers on it. The people are the subjects of the system, and the rights of the people are the soul of the

system. During the political revolution, the revolution of the people's rights occurs simultaneously with the revolution of the institutions themselves. Through this political revolution, the people transform from subjects without political rights under a post-totalitarian regime into true sovereigns who possess full political rights, speak freely, and walk freely upon the earth. In a constitutional democracy, the people do not passively withdraw into private affairs while entrusting elected public servants with governance. Instead, they participate in constitutional and legislative processes through lawmaking initiatives and national referendums, thereby conferring legitimacy upon political power. The people exercise their rights to implement effective public oversight over the separated branches of government and parliament. When public servants become negligent or abuse their power, the people counterbalance them through civil checks and balances, exercising their rights to criticize through speech, protest through action, and challenge through judicial litigation. The people also directly participate in the governance of local affairs at close range through multi-tiered platforms of local autonomy.

5. The Universality and Local Adaptability of Constitutional Democracy

As the "fundamental good" of modern political civilization, the constitutional democratic system serves as a normative guide for concrete practice and a framework reference for designing blueprints—not the blueprint itself. On the path of political revolution, China cannot replicate or transplant any nation's system. Given the causal relationship between centralized authority and the cycle of strong constraints—weak freedoms—frequent tyranny, dismantling centralized power is an inevitable necessity for China's political revolution. To this end, we must learn from and draw upon the American federal system. However, China should not follow the early American model of limiting the central government to military and foreign affairs alone. For a significant period during its early stages, the central government should retain substantial authority over economic regulation and planning, welfare-state arrangements, human rights protection, and the operation of scientific, technological, and cultural systems. A small yet strong government is more desirable, but the philosophy of laissez-faire liberalism should not become China's dogma. A viable government

philosophy should strike a balance between moderate proactivity and high-quality, low-cost governance, while ensuring freedom from coercive power.

6. Openness and Inclusivity in Constitutional Democracy

While we must refute the lies of anti-democratic forces with reasoned arguments, we must respect differing opinions on constitutional democratic strategies from those who sincerely affirm the values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. We should refine ourselves through mutual challenge and encouragement. Diversity and competition are, first and foremost, a moral imperative, while also holding strategic value. Not only differing ideologies, but also diverse political or social forces—provided they demonstrate constructive potential—should be embraced by China's constitutional democracy movement. We welcome the decisive break of the CCP's democratic, reformist, anti-corruption, and nationalist factions from the corrupt privilege complex, courageously seizing this historic opportunity for democratization. To the post-totalitarian stability maintenance system that views constitutional democracy as an abyss, we offer this counsel: underpinned by the baseline of humanity and justice, constitutional democracy—defined by goodwill, moderation, and tolerance—cannot be a dead end for any opponent. All who pursue virtue, achieve merit, or exercise restraint can share in the developmental opportunities afforded by a constitutional democratic polity.

II. Operational Strategy for the Constitutional Democratic System Revolution

Political philosophy emphasizes theoretical reflection, while strategies for regime revolution focus on practical implementation. The former points toward the direction, ideals, values, and goals of political transformation, while the latter addresses the pathways, means, methods, and tactics of such change. Guo Feixiong's self-defense statement, "The Future History Is Profoundly Meaningful," articulates his strategy for regime revolution—his greatest contribution to the cause of constitutional democracy.

1. A group of pioneers and martyrs possessing apostolic zeal for the cause of constitutional democracy are crucial explorers of the revolutionary strategy for constitutional democracy.

Guo Feixiong's commitment to constitutional democracy reached the

level of a religious faith—unwavering and steadfast. For this conviction, he endured excruciating physical and mental torment: "I was subjected to 13 days and nights of sleep deprivation through relentless interrogation. For 42 days, I was shackled to a bed frame with my hands and feet pierced by iron spikes. I suffered countless instances of verbal abuse, beatings, and hair-pulling torture. In this real-life ordeal—not a movie plot—my tormentors concentrated high-voltage electric batons on my genitals. In the early hours of that day, overcome by grief and fury, I threw myself violently against glass and walls in a desperate act of resistance. Miraculously, I survived without permanent injury! Under any circumstance, coercion, or torture, I upheld two fundamental principles: never abandoning the ideals of freedom and democracy, and never betraying or identifying others. Facing unforeseen trials in peacetime, I preserved the life creed I had upheld since childhood and safeguarded the eternal purity of my soul." During his four periods of detention, he undertook five hunger strikes totaling 186 days. Guo Feixiong's extraordinary sacrifice also yielded strategic political outcomes: First, it exposed the brutality of authoritarian rule, shattering its colossal lies about "enshrining human rights in the constitution" and "governing by law." Second, by demonstrating humanity's latent capacity to endure extreme blows, it helped ordinary people overcome their paralyzing fear of totalitarianism. Third, it ignited widespread righteous indignation among people of conscience both domestically and internationally. It even stirred respect among some within the authoritarian system who retained their humanity for those fighting for freedom and democracy, while also provoking shame among those complicit in the regime's atrocities.

2. Advancing from ideological enlightenment to political action is the crucial step in the constitutional democratic revolution.

Guo Feixiong is not merely a thinker but, more importantly, a doer. He asserts that action is imperative for advocates of liberal democracy, for only through action can we overcome the political terror imposed by totalitarianism through violence and lies, and reclaim our natural, healthy, free, and sovereign humanity. Contemporary advocates for constitutional democracy in China must find effective methods to heal psychological wounds—both their own and those of the populace. Beyond championing the idealistic values of liberty and democracy to awaken citizens' reverence

for personal dignity, freedom, rights, and sovereignty, it is crucial to lead by example. We must guide awakened citizens to act in pursuit of the Chinese nation's core interest: the cause of constitutional democracy. Action is the best enlightenment; action is the objective testament to the subject's conscious realization. Action—and the more resolute, sustained action that follows bearing its consequences—is the sole path for individual citizens toward a rebellion of conscience, the self-affirmation of dignity, and the elevation of the soul. Only through action can people avoid falling into aimless confusion due to a lack of concrete examples to guide them.

3. Political action follows a gradual escalation process, requiring the timely integration of mobilized democratic forces through diverse organizational strategies.

Guo Feixiong states that seizing major historical opportunities to conduct political experiments on individual case platforms, mobilize public forces, and advance political liberalization and democratization is one of the primary political strategies of our rights defense movement. He divides the rights defense movement into five stages, from low to high intensity. As the influence of the freedom camp grows, professional political activists mature, and political phobia diminishes, attracting increasing new forces, the core of the rights defense movement gradually shifts from neutral legal zones and low-intensity political arenas toward high-intensity political arenas. In this high-intensity political phase of the rights defense movement, Guo Feixiong's fundamental political operational strategy is:

Systematically and proactively exercising citizens' political rights, including the right to vote and stand for election, freedom of speech, the right to assemble, demonstrate, and protest, freedom of association, local and grassroots self-governance, oversight and recall rights, the right to initiate legislation, and the right to national referendums;

(2) Vigorously advancing the development of civil society, assisting various types of protesters in entering legal activity spaces, and promoting self-governance across all social strata and industries. This aims to establish an independent and developed civil society as the substantive foundation for the democratic movement and the fundamental means for the free association of all people; (3) In the vanguard street politics of the democratic movement, adopting controllable political experimentation methods and multiple

balancing measures to avoid intense confrontation, reduce negative effects, and explore paths toward orderly political opening and mutual benefit between officials and citizens;(4) Utilize legal resources to reshape China's social trajectory, elevating the vast contingent of rights defense lawyers to pivotal roles in historical transformation; (5) All these operational approaches adhere to an orderly model of political revolution, inherently grounded in procedural civility. Without constitutional and legal reform, neither the normalization of citizens exercising political rights nor the political opening process under the national roundtable consensus can be achieved.

4. Normalizing, organizing, and sustaining citizen political actions like assemblies, demonstrations, and marches is the breakthrough point for challenging totalitarian authoritarian systems.

The Southern Weekly protests constituted a small-scale experiment in street politics. The collective action by Guangzhou's civic society in resolutely exercising citizens' political rights achieved an initial victory. Street politics is not the source of unrest as dictators falsely claim; an independent and autonomous civic society can conduct it in an orderly and constructive manner, exercising full control over its scope and intensity. After 24 years of endurance, China's opposition movement has matured sufficiently to shape and control the political landscape. It possesses the capacity to unite diverse social strata through civil society, advancing step by step toward the ultimate goal of constitutional democracy. Through fearless and relentless action, it can dissolve hostility, foster consensus, and forge a path toward pluralistic, win-win political outcomes.

5. Introducing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, abolishing draconian laws, and amending sound legislation are indispensable steps to realize the political rights of Chinese citizens.

The rights defense movement has advanced to a new stage of escalating into a strong political social movement. The primary obstacle encountered at this stage is the prevalence of unjust laws. Peaceful transition must begin by breaking through the chains of these unjust laws, gradually expanding citizens' freedom of action, incrementally increasing their political rights, and step by step stripping away illegal privileges and the coercive power that enslaves the people.This explains the fundamental rationale behind Guo

Feixiong's participation in and promotion of the citizen petition urging the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the "Eight-City Flash Mob" street awareness campaign on the same theme: For the rights defense movement committed to advancing an orderly political revolution, it is essential to drive a transformative movement—one that involves multidimensional societal participation in repealing harmful laws and amending beneficial ones—within the framework of constraints required for peaceful transition: rule of law as a priority, co-construction of procedures, and consensus-based mutual benefit.

III. Profound Historical Implications for the Future

Guo Feixiong's self-defense statement and appeal can be viewed both as a systematic critique of totalitarian authoritarianism and as a profound intellectual dialogue with fellow activists outside prison walls. The issues addressed therein are highly relevant, contemporary, and locally specific. I will briefly comment on several key points here.

1. The Division of Labor and Collaboration Among Enlighteners, Theorists, Political Commentators, Activists, Organizers, and Professional Revolutionaries

Three essential elements underpin social movements and constitutional democracy campaigns: consciousness, organization, and action. Chronologically, consciousness precedes organization, which in turn precedes action. Spatially, however, these three interact inseparably. For instance, while organization and action require some preliminary consciousness, large-scale ideological enlightenment and consciousness revolution can only be achieved through the process of action itself.Organization and action are mutually conditional. Even within the realm of consciousness, coordinated resonance among enlighteners far surpasses solitary cries in the wilderness. These three elements mutually amplify each other, propelling revolution from isolated points to widespread coverage, and from superficial to profound levels. This raises the question of division of labor and collaboration among participants. Some individuals, like Guo Feixiong, simultaneously embody the roles of enlightener, theorist, political commentator, activist, organizer, and professional revolutionary.

However, most people cannot realistically fulfill all these roles, nor is it objectively required of them. Consequently, some primarily undertake the tasks of ideological enlightenment, theoretical construction, and political commentary, while others focus on action and organizational leadership. The former must strive to articulate principles with depth, clarity, precision, and eloquence to awaken and spread revolutionary consciousness among the masses. The latter must unite and organize those with existing revolutionary awareness, expanding from small to large, near to far, and act according to specific plans, steps, strategies, and tactics. However, division of labor and specialization do not equate to operating in isolation. Those in different roles and functions must maintain high coordination to achieve a common goal. This demands a conscious spirit of cooperation from both sides: the former must provide the latter with services in ideology, theory, propaganda, and public opinion; the latter must learn from and consult the former regarding the synthesis of revolutionary experiences worldwide and the analysis of the domestic revolutionary situation. Only then can a dynamic "force field" emerge—one where theory and practice, thought and action mutually stimulate each other, continuously growing and expanding—rather than descending into a fragmented and powerless state at the first sign of setbacks or adversity. Regrettably, such cooperation has yet to materialize, leading to mutual recrimination: the former labels the latter as the "pasta party," while the latter dismisses the former as the "talking-the-talk party."

2. Reformism, Peaceful Revolution, and Violent Revolution

The 1980s and 1990s were an era of reform and modernization. Within that atmosphere, some intellectuals raised the slogan of "saying goodbye to revolution." As state-owned enterprise reforms rapidly bore the bitter fruit of oligarchic monopoly, intellectuals both at home and abroad began proclaiming at the turn of the century that "reform is dead; revolution must return."However, most Chinese people's memory and understanding of revolution is shaped by the English Civil War, the French Revolution, the American War of Independence, the Russian Revolution, and the Chinese Revolution. In short, it is seen as a life-and-death class struggle between the ruling and the ruled—a violent revolution. This type of revolution is seen as diametrically opposed to any form of reform or change within an existing system. While the dichotomy between reform and revolution does reflect

historical realities in many modern nations, it has been disproven by subsequent revolutionary movements and superseded by a tripartite framework encompassing reformist change, peaceful revolution, and violent revolution.

Classifying peaceful revolution as reform is untenable. Reform represents quantitative change, whereas peaceful revolution signifies a fundamental qualitative leap from totalitarian autocracy to constitutional democracy. Reform is driven top-down by the ruling class or faction, while peaceful revolution is propelled bottom-up by the people demanding to cage power. These two points alone suffice to distinguish reform from peaceful revolution. While certain overlaps and intersections may occur between reform and peaceful revolution during counter-movements, this does not negate their fundamental qualitative difference. On the other hand, peaceful revolution and violent revolution are not mutually exclusive or irreconcilable. In fact, even successful violent revolutions, if not preceded by significant civic societal development, carry a high risk of restoration and a reactionary backlash post-revolution. Similarly, peaceful revolution does not necessarily equate to Gandhian nonviolent resistance; the use of necessary force is not excluded within the overall peaceful process. Therefore, a peaceful revolution is more accurately described as one primarily driven by peaceful negotiation, while a violent revolution is more accurately described as one primarily driven by violent overthrow. In most cases, they are actually a mixture of both, differing only in the relative proportions of each. The real issue is not choosing between the two, but how to combine them appropriately according to the times, the place, and the people involved, avoiding two extreme outcomes: either passively allowing a minority to violently disrupt and interrupt the peaceful revolutionary process, or relying solely on violence as the revolutionary means while abandoning the self-organization and democratic unity of the masses (once abandoned, what awaits the masses is inevitably new tyranny).

3. Citizen Rights Protection, Citizen Cultivation, and Political Opposition/Political Revolution

Citizen rights advocacy and civic cultivation, alongside political opposition and political revolution, represent two distinct phases of a constitutional democratic revolution. The former constitutes the

foundational stage—laying the groundwork and establishing the lower structures—while the latter embodies the advanced stage—erecting the superstructure and reaching the pinnacle. These chronologically sequential phases can also be understood as two coexisting yet distinct aspects of the same movement. It is inaccurate to characterize citizen rights advocacy and civic cultivation as apolitical or depoliticized, while viewing political opposition and political revolution as purely superstructural revolutions. The distinction lies in the fact that during the rights advocacy and civic cultivation phase, political objectives and demands are implicit and deliberately concealed, thereby avoiding direct challenges to official "political correctness." This approach enables tangible progress in rights defense movements and carves out limited space for civic society development. By contrast, in the open political opposition and revolution stage, the achievements of rights defense movements and civic society development already exist as prerequisites and foundations. The primary task at this point is to target the regime directly. Clearly, without the groundwork laid in the first stage, political opposition and revolution would be like building on sand—destroyed in moments. Without the second stage, a constitutional democratic revolution cannot be completed.

Rights defense operates on two fundamental levels: first, safeguarding citizens' economic, political, social, and cultural rights under China's current constitution and laws; second, upholding broader and higher rights based on international human rights charters and conventions. Logically, the first level should precede the second. The problem, as some argue, is that the existing legal system serves as a tool of Communist Party dictatorship—doesn't defending rights through this system merely uphold the current regime? This presents a contradiction for us rights defenders, but it must also be recognized that it creates a contradiction for those in power: Overall, China's legal system operates within a framework of unjust laws, yet it does contain provisions of just laws that the ruling class fundamentally refuses to implement. These very provisions become the basis for citizens to defend their rights. The significance of the rights defense movement extends beyond merely safeguarding statutory rights. Its deeper meaning lies in the fact that scattered, isolated, atomized individuals have united and organized themselves, thereby gradually becoming citizens who enjoy de facto public

participation rights. This represents a new social element born within the womb of the old society—a development more crucial than anything else. Conversely, without the gradual organization fostered by lawful rights defense actions, the populace would remain perpetually fragmented, which is precisely the foundation of totalitarian authoritarianism.

4. The Subject Sequence, Roadmap, and Timeline of the Constitutional Democratic Revolution

For Guo Feixiong, "the people" remains a vague collective entity. He has not conducted a detailed class or stratum analysis of "the people," thus failing to establish the concrete formation and primary sequence of the subjects of the constitutional democratic revolution. This also affects his delineation of the roadmap for the future revolutionary process. This limitation may stem from the constraints imposed by liberal political philosophy (which typically opposes class analysis).

I do not shy away from employing class analysis because I am a social democrat who inherits the rational core of liberalism while retaining certain Marxist ideas that remain vibrant—especially for contemporary China. In present-day China, the privileged bureaucratic class is supremely powerful. It is the primary class controlling the nation's economic, political, and cultural resources, possessing a highly defined class consciousness. How can other marginalized classes, if trapped in liberalism's non-class, individualized citizen fantasy and unable to develop strong class consciousness, solidarity, and organization, possibly resist and overthrow this class rule that monopolizes the guns, the knives, the moneybags, and the pens? How can constitutional democracy be achieved?

The two major social contradictions plaguing contemporary China are the conflict between officials and the people and the conflict between labor and capital. Both can be traced back to the contradiction between the privileged bureaucratic-capitalist clique and the masses. Within this structural framework, the following classes can be delineated: the privileged bureaucratic class, the big bourgeoisie, the middle class (small and medium bourgeoisie and intellectuals), the working class, and the peasantry. Through class analysis, I propose the following sequence of driving forces and subjects for a constitutional democratic revolution: working class—peasantry—middle class, and competitive private big bourgeoisie. The

targets of this revolution are the communist totalitarian dictatorship and its defenders—the privileged bureaucratic class and its allied big bourgeoisie. The roadmap for constitutional democratic revolution unfolds as follows: Scenario One: "Initiation by the lower strata—amplification by the middle strata—division and opportunism among the upper strata." Scenario Two: "Initiation by the lower strata—amplification by the middle strata—confrontation between the lower, middle, and upper strata."

Is there a timeline for China's constitutional democratic revolution? Accurate prediction is difficult. After the 1989 events and the Soviet-Eastern European transitions, many held optimistic expectations, yet totalitarian rule persisted for nearly three decades! Given this, Guo Feixiong himself plans to work with idealists over the next ten to twenty years to operationalize a constitutional democratic system as China's institutional reality. Others' predictions vary widely, ranging from a few years to one or two decades. My analysis is this: if the privileged bureaucratic-capitalist elite refuses to yield to the people, the revolutionary situation will rapidly mature as the economic crisis deepens. A fundamental transition from totalitarian authoritarianism to constitutional democracy within five to six years is entirely possible.If the privileged bureaucratic-capitalist elite, considering their long-term interests, chooses to play the "good cards" identified by historian Wu Si—opening monopolized economic sectors, deploying $3 trillion in reserves and 60 trillion yuan in state assets for public welfare, and privatizing land—then during the tug-of-war between officials and the people,and the gradual retreat of officials amid advancing public demands, the one-party dictatorship and totalitarian rule might persist for another decade or two in a weakened or even nominal form. This too would be an inherent part of a peaceful transition and constitutional democratic revolution.

5. The Left and Right Wings of Constitutional Democracy: Social Democracy and Liberal Democracy

Regarding the party system, the constitutional democracy camp has yet to recognize—from the heights of political philosophy, logic, and history—that constitutional democracy inherently possesses two wings: social democracy and liberal democracy. This political structure has long been a reality in most constitutional democracies. Indeed, in the history of Western constitutional democracy, liberal democracy first came to the fore. At that

time, universal suffrage did not exist, and voter eligibility was restricted by property, gender, race, and other factors. The working class not only lacked the right to vote and stand for election but also lacked freedom of association, unable to form their own trade unions or political parties. It was not until the late 19th and early 20th centuries that the working classes of various nations finally secured fundamental political freedoms and rights. However, they also abandoned violent revolution and proletarian dictatorship, renounced Marxism, and instead embraced social democracy or democratic socialism. They chose parliamentary democracy and multiparty systems, selecting social democratic, socialist, and labor parties as their primary political representatives. Communist parties became marginalized far-left entities, even disappearing entirely in many countries. Thus, Western nations developed a constitutional democracy with left-right wings, where social democratic and liberal democratic parties checked each other and alternated in power—a political structure that has persisted for roughly a century. Since center-left social democratic parties and center-right liberal democratic parties (Republicans, Conservatives) represent mainstream public opinion, far-left and far-right parties have been marginalized and compelled to operate within constitutional and legal frameworks.

In the unprecedented upheaval of the coming millennium, hundreds of new parties will inevitably emerge in the short term. However, the logic of party politics has yet to transcend the realm of class politics. Therefore, based on the class analysis outlined above, parties will inevitably form alliances and realignments, ultimately consolidating into four major political forces:(1) A Liberal Democratic Party rooted in the small and medium bourgeoisie and upper-middle intellectuals (collectively termed the middle class or intermediate class); (2) A Social Democratic Party grounded in the working class, peasantry, and lower-tier intellectuals; (3) A New Communist Party based on the lowest strata of the worker-peasant class; (4) A Conservative Party founded upon the large bourgeoisie. Regardless of their political affiliation, any party that adheres to the constitution established by national referendum and laws enacted through democratic procedures, acknowledges the fundamental social contract and rules of political competition—constitutionalism, democracy, and the rule of law—and earnestly seeks voter support through electoral means rather than resorting

to violent revolution, shall be considered a legitimate political party.

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Believing in Love: The Story of Zhang Qing and Guo Feixiong

Yang Maoping

My childhood with my two younger brothers (Mao Quan, the second, and Mao Dong, the third, whose online name is Guo Feixiong) was spent in the countryside with our parents, who had been sent down for re-education through labor. In those days, the word "television" didn't exist in our lives, and movies were few and far between. The only thing that captivated us siblings was reading. This habit of reading accompanied us as we grew up. Later, Maodong entered the Philosophy Department at East China Normal University as the top science student in the county. I excitedly told my close classmates: "He gets to read books his whole life, exploring the world's philosophical treasures—how fortunate my third brother is!" Maodong himself was content, fully immersed in his choice, even though most people considered philosophy too out of step with the times.

He had his own ideas about choosing a partner. He declared, "I absolutely won't let my wife be a housewife. I want a woman who shares my interests to accompany me through life." After marrying Zhang Qing, they were deeply devoted to each other. His affection for Zhang Qing far surpassed what he showed me—the sister who raised him single-handedly (our mother passed away early, and our father was too old).

Before their child was born, he sent Zhang Qing to study at the Foreign Languages Department of South China Normal University. He had her watch 100 Oscar-winning films and write a review after each one. He frequently brought Zhang Qing to gatherings with his literary and artistic friends, cultivating shared interests. This deep bond did not fade with the birth of their two children; rather, it grew even stronger because of them. Zhang Qing explained, "I had a Maodong, and then came a Maoxi. Together, they make something wonderful—that's how my daughter Xixi got her name."

When Zhang Qing moved to the United States with her two children

over a decade ago, she had no relatives nearby and endured immense hardship. Born into a privileged family and spoiled since childhood, she had never endured such hardship before. Yet she gritted her teeth and persevered, never once complaining to Maodong. At that time, only my husband and I, my second son, Maoquan, could visit Maodong monthly. The couple entrusted us to convey only their mutual concern and care—not sighs of a difficult fate, but resilient will and unassuming love.

In the U.S., an older sister kept in closer touch with me. Back then, there was no WeChat, and transatlantic calls were expensive. Zhang Qing, often strapped for cash, struggled with the cost. Learning of this, the older sister arranged three-way calls between us to save on expenses. Once, Xixi overheard and exclaimed, "Mommy is so lucky! She can talk directly to Auntie and hear about Daddy!" Another time, when Zhang Qing handed the phone to Xixi, the poor little girl clutched the receiver and was so overcome with emotion she couldn't speak. How agonizing that longing must be, how lonely their lives in America must feel.

In 2018, I couldn't bear the worry any longer and used my vacation to visit Zhang Qing and the children in the United States.I witnessed firsthand the hardships of the three of them—the entire family surviving on the meager income Zhang Qing earned from working part-time while studying. After paying rent, there was barely anything left. Even in such dire circumstances, Zhang Qing scrimped and saved, buying many clothes for Maodong and asking me to bring them back to China. For various reasons, Maodong didn't see these clothes until January 2021. After Zhang Qing fell ill, I traveled to the U.S. to care for her and brought some of these clothes back with me, intending them for Maodong, who was supposedly coming later. Upon seeing them, Zhang Qing immediately clutched them tightly to her chest and wore them daily over her undergarments. How deeply she must have longed for her husband's warmth. Yet, their dream of reunion ultimately remained unfulfilled.

This past January, Maodong traveled from Guangzhou to Shanghai, intending to fly to the United States to care for Zhang Qing, who was terminally ill. This journey never materialized; the last glimmer of hope vanished. Devastated and utterly distraught, he called me, sobbing uncontrollably and repeating how sorry he was to Zhang Qing and their

child. He wished he could have borne the illness himself as atonement, insisting it was unjust for Zhang Qing to suffer. At that moment, I too wept uncontrollably. I couldn't understand why my brother and sister-in-law, Zhang Qing, who were so kind-hearted, deserved such a fate.

Not long ago, I bought Mao Dong a car, hoping he could drive around nearby areas to clear his mind. He asked me, "Sis, how do I buy personal insurance? I want to get it. If something happens to me, all the insurance money should go toward Zhang Qing's treatment." I could only urge him, "You absolutely must not have any accidents."If something happens to you, Zhang Qing will never recover, and no amount of insurance money will help." I don't know if he took my words to heart, but I do know that once he nearly had a car accident, and it left me terrified for a long time afterward.

Zhang Qing's illness was already terminal when discovered. I believe it stemmed from over a decade of suffering—living abroad and enduring the pain of marital separation. As her eldest sister, I felt utterly helpless. Beyond the heartache, there was nothing I could do. Every day, I knelt in prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, pleading for hearts to soften, for long-separated spouses to reunite, for broken families to be restored, and for Zhang Qing to receive her husband's care and comfort in her remaining years—to find peaceful rest in his embrace.

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