

ARCHIVES | 1989

UPHEAVAL IN CHINA; Reluctant Rebel Joins Students' Cause

By **SHERYL WUDUNN** and **SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES** MAY 28, 1989

About the Archive

This is a digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive, before the start of online publication in 1996. To preserve these articles as they originally appeared, The Times does not alter, edit or update them.

Occasionally the digitization process introduces transcription errors or other problems. Please send reports of such problems to archive_feedback@nytimes.com.

When Gao Xiqing, a former Wall Street lawyer, spent the night on Tiananmen Square in solidarity with students of his who were demonstrating for democracy, he was shaken awake at 2 A.M. by a friend who told him that armed troops were trying to move in on them.

The night passed without incident, but this was not the kind of risk that Mr. Gao had contemplated when he left his New York job last year on a personal mission to help modernize China.

The 36-year-old Mr. Gao had returned to his homeland last year because he believed that there was great hope for China and that the country needed American-educated minds like his to negotiate its way through this stage of dramatic change.

Mr. Gao took a job teaching law at his old university in Beijing, and he began working on a project to establish a national stock exchange in China. Above all, he was going to work within the system, to build the institutions that could push the country forward.

"Building the economy is the best way to change China," Mr. Gao said two months ago, before the student movement began. "In the long run, what we're doing with the stock exchange is more effective than sending off petitions. It's the

most effective way to create a more democratic nation." The Making of a Rebel
But now, after seeing his own law students put their careers and even lives on the line for the democratic movement, Mr. Gao is changing his mind. With his dreams beginning to shatter, Mr. Gao is turning into a rebel.

He has already been told by the school authorities that he has been singled out as a troublemaker, and stands to lose his job if there are widespread purges of intellectuals involved in the democratic movement.

Mr. Gao's story is especially poignant because it is about the disillusionment of a bright young Communist Party member, fiercely dedicated to concepts of democracy, personal rights and egalitarianism that he has believed in ever since he first read Karl Marx.

A thin, strong and energetic law teacher who has recently taken to wearing brightly colored T-shirts and sunglasses to help him bear the hot sun on Tiananmen Square, Mr. Gao had been throwing all his energies until recently into his teaching and into the stock exchange. Often sleeping for only four hours a night, Mr. Gao worked furiously to draft China's first securities law.

But all that seemed to vanish one day after he asked the whereabouts of one of his liveliest students. He was told that she had been on a hunger strike in Tiananmen Square for several days already. 'Obligated to Support Them'

"I was shocked that a person would do this," Mr. Gao recalled. "I had told my students that democracy is a long process, that you can't put a timetable on it. But when they started the hunger strike, I felt obliged to support them."

His students at the University of International Business and Economics, one of the nation's most prestigious schools, were the last to join in the demonstrations. Of all the students in Beijing, they tend to have the greatest vested interest in the current system; they get the best jobs with the highest pay in foreign corporations.

Mr. Gao had graduated from the same university and then lived in the United States for six years until his return last summer. He attended Duke University Law School, and then became the first citizen of the People's Republic of China to pass the New York State bar exam. Later he worked at Mudge, Rose, Guthrie, Alexander & Ferdon and became an adjunct associate professor at Duke University Law School.

The trappings of life in the United States - the material satisfactions of Wall Street, including ski trips whenever there was time - were a far cry from the deprivation he had experienced as a child and teen-ager in the central Chinese city

of Xian. He nearly starved during the Cultural Revolution launched by Mao Zedong in 1966. His father was jailed for five years and his mother was sent away to the countryside. Hunting for Food

For nearly two years, Mr. Gao, a homeless teen-ager, roamed the streets, hunting for food when his small monthly stipend ran out. Once he walked almost 20 miles to the home of relatives, only to be told that they had no food to give him.

"We'd go out and steal from shops and military camps," Mr. Gao acknowledged, looking embarrassed.

But during that time, Mr. Gao read all of Mao's works, and he read Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Now, as rumors of arrests of intellectuals circulate throughout the capital, Mr. Gao worries about being banished once again to that kind of life, or of being confined to a jail cell with no books or writing paper. Mr. Gao already believes he will not be allowed to leave the country to return to Duke University to teach.

Yet as he insists on sticking with the democracy movement, he gives practical advice to his students.

"This may be a dangerous time, and you shouldn't all feel you have to be heroes," he told his students as they gathered around him in Tiananmen Square on the night when martial law was first imposed May 20. "Those of you who are women, or are single children, should leave right now. There is no shame in leaving."

When one student stood up to say that all the students would remain, Mr. Gao reproached him.

"You've got to learn about democracy," Mr. Gao said. "Democracy means not only that the majority rules, but that the minority also has rights. If someone wants to leave, then that is absolutely their right."

A version of this article appears in print on May 28, 1989, on Page 1001016 of the National edition with the headline: UPHEAVAL IN CHINA; Reluctant Rebel Joins Students' Cause.