

The “Active Rightists” of 1957 and Their Legacy

“Right-wing Intellectuals,” Revisionists, and Rights Defenders

CHEN ZIMING

In a recent essay, Chen Ziming makes use of current publications and many first-hand witness accounts to bring a new perspective to the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. The first part draws a distinction between “active rightists” (zhudong youpai) and “passive rightists” (beidong youpai) and further divides the former category into three groups: “right-wing intellectuals”, “revisionists” and “rights defenders,” analysing the specificities of and differences between these groups. While the “right-wing intellectuals” consisted of democratic personalities influential prior to 1949, particularly Zhang Bojun and Luo Longji, who advocated “changing the constitution and the mode of government,” the “revisionists” encompassed intellectuals within the Party (Li Shen zhi and Liu Binyan) as well as students raised “under the red flag” (Lin Xiling and Tan Tianrong). Influenced by recent developments within the communist camp, they denounced the personality cult and the excesses of the system and called for a change of political and ideological line in favour of a “great democracy.” The “rights defenders” referred to the constitution of the People’s Republic of China to denounce violations of political rights (in particular during political campaigns), and of individual freedoms, economic and social rights, as well as the absence of liberty in the scientific, cultural, and artistic spheres (epitomized by the suppression of entire academic fields such as law, political science, and sociology). The last part of the article highlights the legacy of the movement, and describes how its ideas have been taken further by various forces campaigning for a democratisation of China. For this issue of China Perspectives, we have chosen to publish a full translation of the part of Chen Ziming’s essay that deals with the first group of rightists, the “right-wing intellectuals,” as well as substantial extracts from the last part. Interested readers may refer to the full Chinese text on the CEFC’s website. (Editor’s note)

Many different figures have been given for the precise number of rightists attacked in the 1957 Anti-Rightist Campaign. In September 1979, in its endorsement of the *Request for instructions on various issues concerning the continuous implementation of Central Committee Document No. 55* [1978] submitted by the five central departments, the Central Committee of the CCP referred to “the more than 550,000 people throughout the country who were classified as rightists” and went on to say:

....the numbers of those defined as “centre-rightists” in the anti-rightist struggle, and of workers and people’s police designated anti-socialist elements were large, as was the number of family members implicated because of rightist problems. The figures include approximately 160,000 who merely lost their official posts and had to be re-assigned. Some of these people, even though not labelled as rightists, have been punished more severely than the rightists

and have had to contend with very difficult circumstances. [...] In addition, many rural primary school teachers and basic-level cadres were also classified as rightists at that time, and although subsequently the Central Committee issued an order that the identification of rightists in rural primary schools and among basic-level cadres was not permitted, by then it was too late, and the labelling had gotten out of hand. Here, too, those involved were not in a minority. In these two groups there were overall tens of thousands of “centre-rightists” who, whether or not they had been labelled as rightists, were nevertheless punished in the same way as the rightists, or even more harshly than the rightists.

If all these groups of people are added together, the total cannot be less than one million. In 1991, in his book *Open Conspiracy*, Ding Shu wrote: “Investigations have revealed that the total number of people identified as rightists during the Anti-Rightist Campaign was 1.3 mil-

Chen Ziming

The author of this essay, Chen Ziming, is an important personality in the Chinese democratic movement. Born in 1953, Chen underwent re-education through labour in 1975 for having criticised Mao. After his release in April 1976, he played a major role in the April 5th Movement directed against the leftist line. He was imprisoned when the movement was repressed, and after his release in 1978, he participated in the creation of the journal *Beijing zhi chun* (Beijing Spring), the most moderate of the Democracy Wall movement publications. Having entered the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, he was elected a People's Congress representative for Haidian District in 1980. In the mid-1980s, together with Wang Juntao, he initiated a university by correspondence, and the Beijing Research Centre on Economy and Society, an independent organization seen as a symbol of Chinese civil society in the 1980s. Wang and Chen also bought up the *Jingjixue zhoubao*, which became a major mouthpiece of the democratic movement in the run-up to 1989. Initially doubtful about the student demonstrations, Chen joined the movement after the proclamation of martial law, and was instrumental, with Wang Juntao, in creating the Union of people from all circles in the capital. Branded as the "black hands" behind the Tiananmen protests, both were sentenced to 13 years in prison in 1991. After he was freed, Chen Ziming, who unlike Wang Juntao served out his entire sentence and chose to remain in China, created a website that was subsequently shut down by the authorities. In 2007, he was allowed to visit Hong Kong to carry out research; the text translated below was first presented as a lecture at the University Service Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Despite the hardships he has endured, Chen Ziming continues to dedicate himself to advancing the cause of China's democratisation. This is probably one of the reasons why he is interested in the various episodes in which the democratic movement has manifested itself in China since the foundation of the People's Republic. Like many of his companions in the fight for democracy, he believes that the absence of a structured memory of the movement is one of its weak points in China today. This essay is an example of Chen's attempt to remedy this situation by analysing the ideas and writings of dissenting intellectuals of the 1950s and showing that they remain very relevant: "Fifty years have passed, and the ideas bequeathed to us by the different types of 'active rightist' of 1957 still inspire us; their spirit of exploration and their courageous resistance still encourage us to fight till our last breath for the democratisation of China."

Jean-Philippe Béja

lion."⁽¹⁾ In January 2006, a Hong Kong magazine quoted figures revealed at an enlarged meeting of the Politburo on 3 May 1958, which showed that the total number of people in all the categories of rightist was more than three million.⁽²⁾

In June 1980, the Central Committee departments concerned decided that the rightist classification of Zhang Bojun, Luo Longji, Chu Anping, Peng Wenying, and Chen Renbing should not be revised. By then, with the possible exception of Chu Anping, of whom all trace had been lost, Chen Renbing was the only one of the five still alive. To friends, Chen referred to himself as "the only surviving genuine rightist."⁽³⁾ How many "genuine rightists" there were among the 550,000 or 1,300,000 or 3,000,000 is a very interesting question. Judged by the definition given in Mao Zedong's *Things are About to Change* ("rightists, who are anti-Communist"), the number of "genuine rightists" was tiny. Even Zhang Bojun and Luo Longji, the leaders of

what was known at the time as the "Zhang-Luo alliance," never opposed communism or had the courage or determination to try to overthrow the Communist Party. If, however, we were to judge them according to the "Six Criteria"⁽⁴⁾ added when Mao revised his *On the Correct Handling of*

1. Ding Shu, *Yang mou: "Fan you" qian hou* (Open Conspiracy: Before and after the "Anti-rightist campaign"), Hong Kong, Jiushi niandai zazhi she, 1991 (Editor's note).
2. Muren: "Just how many rightists were targeted in 1957?", on the *Xin Shiji* (New Century) website.
3. Xu Youwei, "Tuo mian zi gan: Chen Renbing de wannian" (Swallowing the insults: The final years of Chen Renbing), *Bainian chao* (Hundred years tide), Beijing, 2003, No. 8.
4. The Six Criteria were "1) [Words and deeds] should help to unite, and not divide, the people of all our nationalities; 2) [They] should be beneficial, and not harmful, to socialist transformation and socialist construction; 3) [They] should help to consolidate, and not undermine or weaken, the people's democratic dictatorship; 4) [They] should help to consolidate, and not undermine or weaken, democratic centralism; 5) [They] should help to strengthen, and not shake off or weaken, the leadership of the Communist Party; 6) [They] should be beneficial, and not harmful, to international socialist unity and the unity of the peace-loving people of the world." "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People," in *Mao Zedong xuanji* [Selected works of Mao Zedong], Vol. 5 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977), p. 393.

痛击右派分子猖狂进攻,保卫社会主义成果!



Propaganda poster from the Anti-rightist Campaign, calling to "Fiercely attack rightists, give the assault ruthlessly, preserve the achievements of socialism."

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Contradictions Among the People, the number of "genuine rightists" could rise substantially, because the interpretation of these criteria was much more flexible.

This article will not adopt the classification of "genuine rightists" versus "false rightists," because the two were so intermingled that it would be hard to differentiate "genuine" from "false"; rather, it will make use of the distinction between "active rightists" and "passive rightists," because it is easier to distinguish between those who took to the stage and performed voluntarily and those who had to be forced to participate. [...]

“Rightist intellectuals”

In *Things are About to Change*, written on 15 May 1957, Mao Zedong divided "rightists" into two types: "right-wing intellectuals in society" (*shehui shang de youyi zhishi fenzi*) and "rightists in the Communist Party – revisionists" (*gongchandang de youpai – xiuzheng zhuyizhe*).⁽⁵⁾ By intellectuals "in society," he meant the intellectuals in all sectors

of society who belonged to the democratic parties or who lacked any party affiliation. In this section, I intend first to analyse what was meant by "right-wing intellectuals in society," and in the following section I will discuss what Mao meant by the term "revisionists."

Those whom Mao dubbed "right-wing intellectuals," represented principally by people such as Zhang Bojun and Luo Longji, were in actual fact largely centre-left intellectuals; ten years earlier, this was how Mao, too, had looked on them. In the mid- to late 1940s, these left-wing intellectuals had belonged to the Communist Party (CCP), and embraced Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought; right-wing intellectuals belonged to the Guomindang (GMD) and were disciples of the official ideology, the Three People's Principles of the revolutionary Sun Yat-sen, which had by then metamorphosed into the traditionalist authoritarianism under the leader of the party and the country, Chiang Kai-shek. Between the Communists and the GMD was the

5. Mao Zedong *xuanji* (Selected works of Mao Zedong), Vol. 5, p. 424.

“third party” (*di san fangmian*) or “intermediate force” (*zhongjian shili*). Those intellectuals who belonged to the “intermediate force” were divided into centre-leftists and centre-rightists. The former were social democrats such as Zhang Bojun and Luo Longji, while the latter were liberals such as Hu Shi and Fu Sinian. After 1949, right-wing intellectuals and centre-right intellectuals either fled (to Taiwan, Hong Kong or elsewhere overseas), were suppressed (by “extermination, imprisonment or surveillance”; *sha, guan, guan* 殺關管), or went into hiding (they were well aware of the nature of the Communist Party, and would not readily become involved in “open conspiracy”). Now that the political spectrum had, as it were, ruptured in the middle, the former centre-left intellectuals became, in Mao’s eyes, the new “right-wing intellectuals” in spite of the fact that neither their ideological viewpoint nor their political stand had materially changed.⁽⁶⁾ There were, of course, some less well-known intellectuals on the right wing who did stand to the right of the political spectrum in the ordinary sense.

In the Anti-Rightist Campaign, one major “label” that “right-wing intellectuals” such as the “Zhang-Luo alliance” had to bear was that of “anti-communist,” the specific accusation being that they were demanding to “take turns being in charge” (*lunliu zuozhuang* 輪流坐莊)⁽⁷⁾ and trying to “replace [the Party]” (*qu er dai zhi* 取而代之).⁽⁸⁾ In fact, every one of the accusations levelled against them was a fabrication.

The most important proof of their alleged anti-communism was that the People’s University lecturer Ge Peiqi wanted to “kill communists.” On 27 May, *Renda Zhoubao* (People’s University weekly), the internal magazine of the People’s University, published a speech Ge had made three days earlier, which contained passages such as the following: “It is good that Party members should have a masterful attitude, but it is not permissible for you to believe that ‘we are the state.’ [...] If you do a good job, that is fine; if you do not, the masses can bring you down and kill communists; if they overthrow you, this cannot be said to be unpatriotic; it is because the communists are not serving the people.” That afternoon, Ge Peiqi went to see Nie Zhen, the deputy secretary of the People’s University Party Committee and vice-chancellor of the university, and requested some corrections, because the remark as quoted above differed from what he had originally said. However, not only did the *Renda Zhoubao* fail to alter the text, but the comment as published in the *Renmin Ribao* (People’s Daily) four days later was taken further out of context and deliberately distorted.⁽⁹⁾ Even when distorted like this, Ge’s remark was a hypotheti-

cal one – if the Communist Party failed to serve the people, it could be overthrown. Mao said something similar in 1957, and the Chinese communist leaders often reiterated it afterwards. However, this was a case where, as in the proverb, “The local officials are allowed to light a fire, while the common people are not allowed to light a lantern.” The reason why Ge Peiqi’s speech was made with more confidence than speeches by other rightists was that he had once been an underground party worker for the Communists and an intelligence agent who made a great contribution to their cause.

The phrase “taking turns to be in charge” was said to be Zhang Bojun’s idea of politics. But in 1980, the Central Committee’s United Front Work Department admitted in a talk with Zhang’s wife and daughter that “The material used to designate Mr Zhang as a rightist at that time was inaccurate, and none of it, from his idea of Political Design Institutes to his opposition to script reform, held water. But the expression ‘taking turns to be in charge’ had already been used by Cheng Qian to criticise rightists, and it was extended to cover Mr Zhang as well.”⁽¹⁰⁾ “Taking turns to be in charge” means taking turns to hold power, which would mean parliamentary politics, clear separation between the

6. More precisely, after 1949 the thinking of centre-left intellectuals initially moved to the left, but then shifted back towards the right after the “Three Antis” and the “Five Antis” campaigns, agricultural co-operativisation, and the campaign to eliminate counter-revolutionaries, although it did not return to its original position. For example, in October 1948, Luo Longji, in the name of the Central Committee of the Democratic League, which stayed in Shanghai, “wrote a letter containing a series of proposals to the Communist Party, of which the gist was: 1) At home, they should implement a parliamentary system of government; 2) Abroad, they should adopt a policy of ‘harmonious diplomacy’ (i.e., they should have an equally friendly attitude to the United States and the Soviet Union); 3) The Democratic League should be free to be a legal opposition party; 4) Communist Party members within the League should make known their identity, to avoid overlap between Communists and League members.” Quoted from Zhu Zheng, “Fan youpai douzheng shi liuchan de wenhua da geming (The Anti-Rightist struggle was an abortive Cultural Revolution),” in *Hua Xia wenzhai zengkan*, No. 528. The so-called “rightist” views that Luo expressed in 1957 were nowhere near reaching this stage.

7. Li Weihai, when recollecting this period in later years, wrote, “In the middle of May, when for the third or fourth time some bad things were published in the [Wen]huibao, absurd ideas like ‘taking turns to be in charge’ and ‘Hyde Park’ were emerging.” (Li Weihai, in the final volume of *Huiyi yu yanjiu* (Recollections and research), (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1986, pp. 833-834).)

8. Mao Zedong claimed that “It is the Zhang-Luo alliance [...] who summon the storm and churn the waves, plot in secret and incite discontent among the masses, make contacts high and low and seek responses far and near; it is only they whose estimate of the current situation is that utter confusion

everywhere will lead to their take-over and whose ultimate aim is to complete their grand scheme by gradual steps.” (“*Wenhuibao* de zichenjieji fangxiang yingdang pian (The bourgeois orientation of the *Wenhuibao* must be criticised),” in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Selected works of Mao Zedong). Vol. 5, p. 435).

9. *Renmin ribao*, 31 May 1957.

10. Zhang Yihe, “Yue shi qiku yue danping – huiyi wo de fuqin Zhang Bojun (The more uneven it is, the smoother it becomes – remembering my father, Zhang Bojun)” on the *Zhongguo qingshaonian xin shiji dushuwang* website.



Poster calling to "Root out and publicly expose the counter-revolutionary revisionists."

ruling party and the opposition parties, competitive elections, and deciding who should hold power on the basis of a popular ballot. Such a desire may indeed have existed in the hearts of the leaders of the "rightist intellectuals," but they had never expressed it during the rectification campaign. When Zhang had recommended having Political Design Institutes (*zhengzhi sheji yuan* 政治设计院), he clearly stated: "This is not the parliamentary politics of capitalist states."⁽¹¹⁾ At that time, the "right-wing intellectuals in society" never had any "wild ambition" to "replace [the Party]": their goals were coalition government, order and authority, participatory decision-making, and, at best, to have parties "on an equal footing" (*fen ting kang li*).

When the government was established in 1949, both the Communists and the democratic parties signed the *Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference* (CPPCC), acknowledging that the new regime was a coalition government that "included representatives of the working class, the peasants, the revolutionary

army, the intellectuals, the petit bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie, the national minorities, overseas Chinese, and other patriotic and democratic elements." At the height of the rectification campaign, Chu Anping said:

At this point, I'd like to give an example, and ask Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou for their advice. Before liberation, we heard Chairman Mao call for the organisation of a coalition government with those from outside the Party. When our nation was founded in 1949, three of the six vice-chairmen of the Central People's Government were from outside the Party, two of the four vice-premiers were from outside the Party, and the government truly did look like a coalition government. But since then the government has been re-organised, so that there is now only

11. Zhang Bojun, "Guanyu chengli 'Zhengzhi Shejiyuan' de fayan (Speech on setting up 'Political Design Institutes')," *Renmin ribao*, 22 May 1957.

one vice-chairman of the PRC [outside the Party], and the posts of the original non-Party vice-chairmen of the Central People's Government have been moved to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress [NPC]. That aside, of the 12 vice-premiers currently on the State Council, not a single one is a non-Party person – is this because there is nobody among the non-Party people fit to hold such a post, and no one who could be trained to take on such a task? Perhaps this arrangement [a coalition government] could be looked into again, bearing in mind both the desire to unite with people from outside the Party, and to unite the whole nation, and also the impression this conveys, both at home and abroad.⁽¹²⁾

His meaning was clear – he was hoping that the country would return to a situation where it had “coalition government.”

It was Mao Zedong who first broached the matter of prominent persons from the democratic parties holding posts but having no power. At the first Forum for Democratic Personages held by the Central United Front Work Department, Zhang Bojun, then Minister of Communications, pointed out that “where non-Party people are in leadership positions, it is in reality the leading Party groups that make all the decisions, and that is the basic reason that non-Party people have positions but no power.”⁽¹³⁾ Luo Longji, also a Minister at the time, commented that within the Ministry of Forestry he had both a position and power, but with eight offices of the State Council above the Ministry, plus the State Planning Commission and the National Economic Commission, and various departments of the Party Central Committee, the Ministry had no power at all.⁽¹⁴⁾ It was later revealed that as soon as Luo took up his post, he had said, “In the administrative units, it is administration, and not the Party, that is in command, and the Party must be subordinate to administration.[....] From now on, discuss everything with me first.” But his attempt to intervene in the work of the cadres’ office in this way was rebuffed, and from then on he “lacked sufficient enthusiasm” for his work as Minister and gave up trying to give orders.⁽¹⁵⁾ Zhang Bojun commented:

In meetings of the State Council, for example, they often produce something that has already been prepared, and ask us for our opinions: we could do with fewer such formalist meetings. But if it were possible

to ask questions, produce material, and talk it over properly, if there were many things to discuss and everyone could develop their own ideas, nobody would feel there were too many meetings. [...] If, when we first started work, we had listened more to the views of the Standing Committee of the NPC, the CPPCC, and the democratic parties, we would have taken fewer wrong turnings. If all aspects of issues such as the anti-illiteracy campaign, or the five-year cycle of primary education or the popularisation of the two-wheeled double-shared plough had been discussed by the ministries of the State Council first, in the light of the material available, or if they had been discussed by the democratic parties, senior intellectuals, and experts, not as much damage would have been done. If we go ahead with things when they have been decided solely within the Party, it will not be possible to achieve the goals desired. Last year, for example, only local Party committee secretaries and a minority of non-Party senior cadres were tasked with discussing problems within the system, and the division of powers between the centre and the local areas. Discussion within the Party was seen as the most important thing. Yet we ought to avail ourselves of the People's Political Consultative Conference, the various NPC Committees, and the democratic parties when discussing such matters, because they all have appropriate knowledge and experience. The same applies to script reform, which I believe is neither a state secret nor a question of class struggle, but a question of internal contradictions within the people, and yet it has been discussed only by a few enthusiasts.⁽¹⁶⁾

Zhang made no mention of any of the more important state matters, such as the nation-wide promotion of agricultural co-operativisation and the launching of the campaign to eliminate counter-revolutionaries (*sufan yundong* 肅反運動),

12. Chu Anping, “Xiang Mao zhuxi he Zhou zongli ti xie yijian (Some suggestions for Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou),” *Renmin ribao*, 2 June 1957.
13. Zhu Zheng, *1957 nian de xiatian: cong baijia zhengming dao liangjia zhengming* (The summer of 1957: from a hundred schools contending to two families contending), (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1998, p. 63).
14. Luo Longji, “Guanyu chengli ‘Pingfan weiyuanhui’ de fayan (Speech on the setting up of ‘Committees to redress wrongs’),” *Renmin ribao*, 23 May 1957.
15. Yao Shaner, *Zai lishi de xuanwo zhong - Zhongguo bai ming da youpai* (In the whirlwind of history – China's hundred major rightists), (Beijing: Chaozhua chubanshe, 1993), p. 70, p. 64.
16. Zhang Bojun, “Guanyu chengli ‘zhengzhi shejiyuan’ de fayan (Speech on the establishment of ‘Political Design Institutes’).”

where the decision process had steered well clear of “the Standing Committee of the NPC, the CPPCC, and the democratic parties.”

Luo Longji believed that, in the light of the fact that the “Three Antis” (*sanfan*) and “Five Antis” (*wufan*) campaigns and the campaign to eliminate counter-revolutionaries (*sufan*) had been carried out by leaders of the Communist Party, when it came to “rehabilitation” (*pingfan*), major figures from the democratic parties and non-party personages, as well as members of the leading party, should be allowed to participate, in order to demonstrate the success of these campaigns, and show that they would help anyone with a grievance to solve their problems. He suggested that “a commission should be set up by the People’s Congress and committees of the CPPCC, not only to investigate the achievements in the past of the Three Antis and Five Antis campaigns and the campaign to eliminate counter-revolutionaries, but also to publicly encourage all of those who have a grievance to lodge their complaints. The commission would be made up of members of the leading party and the democratic parties, and a cross-section of people from all walks of life.” He advocated that local people’s congresses and political consultative conferences should also set up similar commissions, to form a system of them.⁽¹⁷⁾ Because the figures from the democratic parties and non-party figures had already been reduced to political flower-vases in the NPC and the CPPCC system, Luo was hoping that the setting up of a new system with real political functions would enable them to take part in the decision process. He called for “the CPPCC, the NPC, the democratic parties, and the mass organisations to be the four Design Institutes of politics,” but he wanted them to play a purely advisory role. “Some items of basic construction in politics should be given over to them for discussion first, for ‘three cobblers with their wits combined equal Zhu Geliang, the master mind’. [...] From now on, when the Standing Committee of the NPC and the CPPCC discuss an issue, every ministry on the Committee should send a minister to the meeting to represent it and explain its policy on that issue.”⁽¹⁸⁾ He hoped that these “Political Design Institutes” would lead to a better understanding of the situation, to the exchange of views, and the making of suggestions, but he dared not hope that they would have the right to make political decisions or veto them, which was why he said this idea was not a question of “the parliamentary politics of a capitalist state.” Wang Zaoshi’s view of reform of the CPPCC was even further from modern parliamentary politics. He said: “The imperial censorate (*yushi* 御史) system in ancient China meant that the cen-

sors had the right to impeach officials independently and publicly, and historically this right played an important role. Perhaps we can consider expanding the monitoring role of the CPPCC, which already exists, into something similar to the power to impeach of the imperial censors. This would not only have the effect of mutual supervision in a practical and obvious way, it would also foster and carry on the fine tradition of scholars of integrity that China has had throughout her history.”⁽¹⁹⁾

In his “Preliminary confession”⁽²⁰⁾ of 15 July 1957, Luo Longji acknowledged that “if the democratic parties were to expand their organisation and increase their strength, they would be on an equal footing (*fen ting kang li* 分庭抗禮) with the leading party.” According to the *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* [Modern Chinese dictionary], the expression *fen ting kang li* refers originally to a host and guest standing on opposite sides of the courtyard and bowing to each other, but is used these days as a metaphor for treating one another as equals. In a speech on 10 May, Luo had said, “Before we can have long-term co-existence of the democratic parties and the Communist Party, the question of the long-term existence of the democratic parties needs to be resolved. [...] The Communist Party grew up among the masses of the workers and peasants, but the democratic parties could not develop among the workers and peasants, and grew up principally among the old intellectuals, many of whom are in their thirties and forties, or older. This contradiction should be resolved as quickly as possible, otherwise co-existence will be extremely difficult.” Prior to this, at a meeting of the Democratic League, Zhang Bojun had suggested setting membership targets for the democratic parties: “If the parties together increased their membership to one or two million, this would certainly mean a change in our policy of concentrating on the upper echelons and giving prominence to the cities [...] and for long-term co-existence, youth membership definitely needs to be greatly expanded.”⁽²¹⁾ At that time, the Communist Party already had 12 million members, so even if the democratic parties had expanded their membership to one or two million this would still only have been a tiny fraction of the number of Communists. One can hardly

17. Wang Zaoshi, written speech at the Fourth Meeting of the First People’s Political Consultative Conference in Shanghai on 5 May 1957.

18. Zhang Bojun, *op. cit.*, Note 10.

19. Wang Zaoshi, *op. cit.*, Note 16.

20. Zai Xieyong (ed), *Luo Longji: wode bei bu de jingguo yu fan’gan* (Luo Longji: my experience of being arrested and the disgust it caused in me), (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1999), p. 311.

21. Yao Shaner, *op. cit.*, Note 14, p. 343.

speak of “hosts and guests bowing to one another” if there are no longer any “guests.” Pan Dakui, the chairman of the Sichuan committee of the Democratic League, went a step further in his interpretation of the expression, and proposed the three slogans “political freedom (*zhengzhi ziyou*),” “organisational autonomy (*zuzhi duli*),” and “standing up and sitting down as equals (*pingqi pingzuo*).” Shen Zhiyuan, chairman of the Shanghai committee of the Democratic League, agreed with Pan’s slogans and believed that “from now on the relationship between the Party and the democratic parties will not be that of leader and led, for the democratic parties should be independent. Henceforth they should not follow the United Front Work Department in everything they do, but should manage their own affairs.”⁽²²⁾ To be quite honest, whether we are discussing Zhang and Luo or Pan and Shen, the focus of attention for all of them was the survival and growth of the democratic parties and the development of their vitality and effectiveness – they never got as far as considering “taking turns to be in charge” or “replacing [the Party].” Since “right-wing intellectuals in society” never constituted a real threat to the ruling position of the Communists either subjectively or objectively, why was it that Mao Zedong adopted the attitude that they should be “killed with one blow,” even saying “forget about conscience” and “we must not be soft-hearted”?⁽²³⁾ Because he was unable to accept a government administration that was affected by the checks and balances of society, because he wanted the Communist Party to have “centralised leadership” and “absolute dictatorship,” and he wanted “Party Secretaries to take the lead” and “more personality cults” so that he could push through a series of radical policies without obstruction. Mao Zedong described himself as “a monk under an umbrella, with no hair and no heaven,”⁽²⁴⁾ but what the “right-wing intellectuals” wanted was for him to “strengthen the rule of law” and “tighten up legislation.” Wang Zaoshi, for instance, asserted:

The rule of law has to be strengthened if we are to extend democracy [...] Having experienced several millennia of feudal despotism, China has always regarded the rule of man (renzhi) as more important than the rule of law (fazhi), and so, although it is now eight years since the Liberation, there still remain many feudal vestiges of this in the thinking and living habits of all of us. Therefore we need to pay particular attention to propaganda and teaching about the democratic rule of law. [...] According to the Constitution, we have extensive democratic rights, but we

have not yet enacted legislation to implement them fully. For example there are more than 20 occurrences in the Constitution of phrases such as “according to the law,” “based on the law,” “subject to the law,” and “the safeguards of the law,” but almost no relevant laws have been formulated... What is legal? What is illegal? What is a crime? What are the limits within which there is freedom and beyond which there is not? How should trials be run, and how should punishment be administered? There are many areas that still suffer from a lack of explicit regulations. While enjoying their freedom, the people still do not have an adequate sense of security.

Huang Shaohong said, “Our legislation has fallen behind the objective situation: criminal law, civil law, laws regarding the violation of police regulations, and disciplinary law for public servants have still not been drawn up and published; the rules and regulations concerning economics are even further from completion; the Five-Year Plan is almost at an end, but regulations concerning weights and measures have still not been drawn up. People say ‘Why should we worry? In the Soviet Union this law or that law was drawn up very late in the day.’ [...] But to talk like this is nothing but a defence of bureaucracy and dogmatism.” Huang Shouli believed that the tardiness of legislation was linked to some of the dominant ideas of the Centre. First, “the Centre thinks that even without law it is possible to handle matters in accordance with policy.” Second, “the Centre is afraid that if laws are promulgated too early their hands will be tied. But in fact it is essential to use the law to tie the hands of the cadres and prevent them from breaking the law and riding roughshod over discipline. If there were laws, their arbitrary behaviour could be limited. Therefore, for the Centre to fear that laws would tie their hands is itself to run counter to legality.”⁽²⁵⁾ In Mao’s eyes, law was a tool in class struggle and could be used to tie the hands of others, but there was no way he would allow it to “tie his own hands.”

22. Yao Shaner, *ibid.*, p. 488, p. 340.

23. Zhou Yuanchuan, “Cong Deng Xiaoping de fanyou baogao shuoqi (With regard to Deng Xiaoping’s report on anti-rightism),” on *Xin Shiji* website.

24. This is a pun on “hair/law” in Chinese, meaning he was the kind of person who held nothing sacred. Edgar Snow famously misunderstood the pun, as underlined by Simon Leys in *Broken Images* (Editor’s note).

25. “1957 nian fanyou shiqi de ‘Zhengfajie youpai fenzi miulun huiji’ (The ‘Collected fallacies of the rightist elements in political and legal circles’ of the 1957 anti-Rightist period), on the “Legal history academic network” (Falü shixue muwang) website; Wang Zaoshi, as in Notes 16 and 18.

Propaganda poster to commemorate Mao Zedong's speech "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," given in February 1957 and which encouraged many intellectuals to carry out "loyal" criticism of the government, thus exposing them to persecution.

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In 1956, after the Twentieth Party Congress in the Soviet Union, the international communist movement launched widespread criticism of "personality cults," and the Eighth Congress of the CCP removed from the party constitution all references to Mao Zedong Thought. In such an environment, both national and international, Mao sensed that his power within the Party was diminishing; party and government bureaucrats already formed a special stratum with interests of its own to consider, and they were no longer so biddable when Mao waved his conductor's baton. Mao wanted to exploit his prestige among the masses and his strength "in society" to "correct" those people inside the Party who believed that they were always right. This was the background to the "rectification campaign." Contrary to Mao's expectations, what he called his "popularity among the people" had to a great extent been created by the propaganda machine that he controlled. Within two weeks of the launch of the "rectification campaign" [Editor's note: the early stages of the Anti-Rightist Campaign], he began to feel that dissatisfaction within society would be even more dangerous than the lack of absolute obedience inside the Party, so he urgently changed tack, and adopted the strategy of "killing the chicken to show the monkey." By ruthlessly attacking the "Zhang-Luo alliance" and the "right-wing intellectuals" he himself had invented, he intimidated and threatened any potential opponents within the Party. This new strategy can be said to have basically achieved the desired results.

During the rectification campaign, Zhang Xiruo criticised four kinds of bias: one, the craving for greatness and success; two, ambitiousness for quick success and instant benefits; three, contempt for the past, and four, blind faith in the future. These points described certain things that he had come across, and were in no way directed particularly at Mao.⁽²⁶⁾ Chen Mingshu, however, in a personal letter to Mao, did admonish Mao directly. His description was more pointed than that of Zhang Xiruo. He listed "a craving for greatness and success, capriciousness, partiality, and contempt for the past." He criticised Mao's personality as "too hot-headed and not reasonable enough, too impatient and not measured enough, too hasty and not calm enough; [he] observes but does not pay attention" [...] and said that this "affects the way in which he observes other people and listens to what they say, and brings with it a lack of balance in his policy-making and a loss of awareness of the relative importance of the policy measures he adopts"; [...] "sometimes, carried away by delight or fury, he casts aspersions on the self-respect and status of high-level cadres"; [...] "sometimes he is



too ready to believe false reports from cadres and accept their dogmatic analytical methods, and he makes overly impetuous decisions without having looked seriously and in detail at the matter in question." Mao was furious with Chen for this criticism, and at the Fourteenth Supreme State Council on 1 January 1958, he counter-attacked, declaring: "We cannot avoid 'partiality,' but our bias cannot be towards the rightists, it must be towards socialism. To say that gentlemen (*junzi*) can mix with others without being partisan is not true – when Confucius had Shaozheng Mao killed, he was being partisan."⁽²⁷⁾ Just imagine, if Mao Zedong had been lenient with his 'Shaozheng Mao' and given people like Chen Mingshu room to speak when he was forcing through his three "Red Flag campaigns" (the general line for socialist construction, the Great Leap Forward, and the people's communes), there would never have been that total silence in society, and in the Party only "General Peng [Dehuai]" and a handful of others "drumming and shouting" on behalf of the people at the Lushan conference. The direct consequence of sacrificing the political lives of over a million rightists was the loss of tens of millions of lives to famine. The young Luo Longji was a liberal, as is proved by a series of articles he wrote in the magazine *Xin Yue* (Crescent). In the 1930s, he was involved in setting up the National Socialist party, and later worked as the head of propaganda for the Democratic League, gradually becoming a social democrat.

26. Zhu Zheng, *op. cit.*, Note 12, pp. 73-74.

27. The words of Chen Mingshu and Mao Zedong are quoted from Zhang Lifan, "Chen Mingshu shang shu (Chen Mingshu sends in a memorial)," in *Suibi*, Guangzhou, 2007, No. 1.

In his later years, Luo probably turned again to liberalism, because in 1962 he was proud that in the latest edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* he and Zhang Bojun were described as having been attacked as rightists for “calling for democracy.” Zhang declared publicly in 1957 that he did not advocate “the parliamentary politics of capitalist states,” but four years later he told his daughter Zhang Yihe, “What [Luo Longji] admired about the three-branch system in the West was its separation of powers, and the bicameral system I was talking about was actually also a separation of powers. It does not matter whether there are two, three or four parts. To sum up, the concentration of powers is not feasible in the present world. [...] The beautiful ideals of communism as designed by Mao will never be anything but a blue-print, a fantasy.”⁽²⁸⁾ It was totally understandable that after experiencing the unprecedented agonies of the human catastrophe of the three Red Flag campaigns, centre-leftists should turn towards the centre right, towards liberalism. There has been a similar transformation in the thinking of the generation of Chinese intellectuals that came after Zhang and Luo, and that experienced the Cultural Revolution and being sent to work in the countryside.

Carrying the movement forward and taking it further

[Editor’s note: *After introducing the two other types of “active rightist” – the “revisionists” within the Party and the “rights defenders” – in the last section of his essay Chen Ziming sets about demonstrating the close links that exist between the 1957 movement in all its diversity and the forces for democratisation that are currently at work in China.*]

I pointed out not long ago that there are many different forces giving impetus to China’s democratisation, and among them are three that are particularly important. The first is the democracy movement, in the narrow sense of the phrase, outside the system; the second is the “rights defence movement” (*weiquan yundong*) both within the system and outside it; the third is the democratising forces within the system. The democracy movement in the narrow sense has presented its political demands clearly and publicly: it wishes a totalitarian dictatorship to be replaced by a democratic system and constitutional government. The demands of the “rights defence” movement directly involve human rights, the interests of the group, and the rights and interests of the individual. Since the Communist Party claims that it repre-

sents the interests of all the people, it allows nobody else to share the responsibility or the glory of “rights defence,” so if the “rights defence” movement were to step forward more boldly, it would have a head-on confrontation with those in power. By acting as it does, however, and gaining concrete results in one case after another, it is in fact gradually undermining the centralised control methods of the Communist Party. The forces of democratisation within the system engage only in vague political expressions, but there are certain people who, while hiding their light under a bushel, are secretly contributing in all manner of ways to democratisation, and accumulating resources for the breakthrough of democratisation when it occurs. Therefore, all three forces can be said to belong to the “democratic movement” (*minyun*) in the wider sense.⁽²⁹⁾ It is not hard for us to see that the seeds of the multiple forces of democratisation at work in China today are to be found among the “active rightists” of 1957. The “rightist intellectuals,” of whom Zhang Bojun and Luo Longji were the principal representatives, had been the only remnants on the mainland of the democratic forces for constitutional government in China in the first half of the twentieth century. But by 1957, it was clear that the cutting edge of their ideas had been blunted, and their political backbone was suffering from a severe calcium deficiency. The foundations on which their theories were based – law, politics, sociology, and so on – had been completely suppressed, and their political organisations – the various democratic parties – had been reduced to puppets in the hands of the Communists: their operating expenses were met by the United Front Work Department, and key posts were allocated solely to double agents who were underground Communist Party members. Prior to the Anti-Rightist Campaign, high-ranking officials within the system, such as Zhang and Luo, had been gradually assimilated by the Communists, and this was reflected in their words and actions. It was only after Zhang and Luo were attacked as leading rightists, stripped of their ministerial posts, and relegated to positions outside the system, that their thoughts once again turned towards the concept of constitutional democracy.

Before 1947 and after 1957, it might be possible to look on the ideas of Zhang and Luo as home-grown resources for democracy in China, but the intervening decade was a trough in the evolution of their thinking. Looked at from

28. Zhang Yihe, “Yi pian qing shan liao ci shen – Luo Longji sumiao (This life ends in an expanse of blue hills -- a portrait of Luo Longji),” on the “Tian yi wang” website.

29. Chen Ziming, “Tuidong minzhuhua de duoyuan lilian (The multiple forces giving impetus to democratisation),” on the “Minzhu Zhongguo” website.

today's standpoint, their demand that the democratic parties should be “on an equal footing” with the Communist Party was not nearly enough: it is “taking turns to be in charge” and “replacing the Party” that are the true essence of constitutional democracy. Hu Shi pointed out that:

...if the evolution of liberalism over the past two hundred years has another special and unprecedented political significance, it is that it permits opposition parties and guarantees minorities the right to freedom. In the political struggles of the past, whether the east wind prevailed over the west wind, or the west wind over the east, those on the losing side had a very hard time of it; but democratic politics in the West in the modern age has gradually nurtured a tolerance and an ethos that allows people to have different ideas. Because political power is granted by a majority of the people, when the party in power loses the support of that majority, it becomes an opposition party, and those in power have to prepare to step down and live life out in the cold – and each of the minority parties then has the possibility of gradually becoming the majority party. [...] Peaceful reform has two meanings: firstly, the peaceful transfer of power, and secondly, the carrying out of concrete reforms one step at a time, using legal methods and seeking to make progress little by little.⁽³⁰⁾

Is there an opposition party? Can there be a peaceful transfer of power between the ruling party and the opposition party? These issues are the touchstone of a modern democratic system of government. If today's “democratic parties” are content just to be “parties that participate in government (i.e., to be “political appendages” and “political window-dressing” of the Communists), then China still needs opposition parties in the true sense (i.e., opposition parties that can come into power through competitive elections).

There were discussions and activities among the “active rightists” of 1957 with a view to establishing opposition parties and “taking turns to be in charge.” A Tianjin high-school teacher, Huang Xinping, said, “Why can we not have a system that allows each party to take turns being in power? If we did not ask only the Communist Party to rule, but asked it and all the other parties and factions to put forward different political programmes and let the people decide freely, this would be a stimulus to the Communist Party and the democratic parties alike, and they would have no option but

to work hard to overcome their weaknesses, to win the votes of the people, and to serve the people.” [...]

Before the breakthrough that brings the transition to democracy, in the final analysis very few warriors will be willing to throw themselves into the “democratic movement” in the narrow sense and directly oppose totalitarian despotism; but there might well be many more people from all walks of life who will take part in rights defence activities. During the period of Mao Zedong's “absolute dictatorship,” rights defence activities were regarded as “anti-Party and anti-socialist” and were ruthlessly suppressed – the dreadful experiences of the rights defenders among the “active rightists” mentioned above is evidence of this. But in our current post-totalitarian society, rights defence activities have acquired a certain degree of legality, and may already have managed to bring about some partial improvements. The incidents of the “eight banned books” and the “Chongqing nailhouse” are recent examples.⁽³¹⁾ In such circumstances, the rational thing to do is to separate the “democracy movement” in the narrow sense from rights defence activities and not to bundle them up together.[...] Chen Yongmiao has pointed out that “since the Cultural Revolution, two legal revolutions have occurred – one is the rights defence movement, the other the legal investigations of violations of the constitution. The rights defence movement is a sort of controlled revolution moving towards constitutional government. When true legitimacy conflicts with legality, we must not just carelessly throw out the constitution. The appropriate thing to do would be to interpret the constitution, to find in it a basis in law for opposition and resistance.”⁽³²⁾

Although the democratising forces within the system are not without their own Sun Wukong [Translator's note: The character Monkey, from the early novel *Journey to the West*], who wormed his way into the stomach of the princess with the iron fan – i.e., they do include revolutionaries who could burst out from inside the Communist Party and split it asunder – most of them are still, as it were, Tang monks whose hearts are filled with compassion: revisionists who are evolving peacefully from within, who are remoulding the Commu-

30. Hu Shi, “Liberalism,” in Ouyang Zhesheng (ed.), *Hu Shi wenji* (Collected works of Hu Shi), Vol. 12 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998), pp. 808-809.

31. Eight books pertaining to sensitive subjects, particularly history, were “banned” in various ways in January 2007; one of them is *Past Stories of Beijing Opera Stars* by Zhang Yihe, Zhang Bojun's daughter. The “Chongqing nailhouse” refers to a couple who resisted developers trying to demolish their neighbourhood in Chongqing; their house was finally torn down in April 2007 (Editor's note).

32. Chen Yongmiao, “Yi baoshouzhuyi de fangshi fadong he hezhi geming (Launching and containing revolution using conservative methods),” *Ren yu renquan*, April, 2007.

nist Party by casting off the old and putting on the new and who have “put down their cleavers to become Buddha.” The revisionists among the “active rightists” of 1957 were mostly adherents of Khrushchev-Titoism, that is, of revisionism within the frame of Leninism and Stalinism. Although Khrushchev-Titoism proposed the “three peacefuls and the two entires” (*san he liang quan*; “peaceful co-existence,” “peaceful competition,” “peaceful transition”; “a state of the entire people” and “a party of the entire people”), and also “self-government of the working-class” and “material motivation” [...], it never went any further than Deng Xiaoping’s “Four Basic Principles” and Chen Yun’s “bird-cage” planned economy. The revisionists currently within the system have already progressed (or, one might equally say, regressed) to the stage of Bernstein-Kautskyism, that is, revisionist Marxism. Looked at from the perspective of the history of the international communist movement, this may be a backwards step in the political line, but from the perspective of the history of ideas in China it is intellectually a step forward.

[...]

Actually, the revisionists within the system could take another step forward, and abandon their arguments with the “revisionists of the left” as to which of them are “orthodox Marxists.” [...] Tony Blair, the leader of the British Labour Party, has gone further along the road of “moral socialism.” He frequently refers to the concept of socialism as “socialism,” which he defines as follows: “it is not a socialist theory

of classes, trade unions, or capitalism, but a doctrine to get things done and work together.”⁽³³⁾ He says that his “Third Way represents a modern socialism, which devotes itself whole-heartedly to pursuing its goals of social justice and centre-left politics, but does so using flexible, creative, and far-sighted methods. It is founded on the concept of values that have enabled politics to progress over more than a century – democracy, liberty, justice, mutual responsibility, and internationalism. But it is a third way, because it resolutely bypasses both the old left wing, with its concentration on state control, high taxation, and the interests of the producers, and the new right wing, which demonises and would like to suppress public investment and, often, ‘social’ and collective activities.”⁽³⁴⁾ One might describe Blair’s “socialism” as a revision of “socialism,” but a contemporary one. The Chinese Communists will only have the opportunity to play a new political role on the stage of constitutional politics in the future if they have a party that has evolved towards the “socialist-labour” type found in developed nations.

Fifty years have passed, and the ideas bequeathed to us by the different types of “active rightist” of 1957 still inspire us; their spirit of exploration and their courageous resistance still encourage us to fight till our last breath for the democratisation of China. •

• Translated by Caroline Mason

33. Wang Xuedong *et al.*, “Di san tiao lu yu shehui minzhu zhuyi de zhuanxing” (The Third Way and the transition to social-democracy), Beijing, *Dangdai shijie yu shehui zhuyi* (Contemporary World and Socialism), no. 3, 2000.

34. See Chen Lin *et al.* (eds.), *Di san tiao daolu: shiji zhi jiao de xifang zhengzhi biange* (The third way: changes in Western politics at the turn of the century), (Beijing : Dangdaijie chubanshe, 2000), p.5.