THE 2001 RAMON MAGSAYSAY AWARD FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

BIOGRAPHY OF WU QING

"You are a human being first, then a woman." With those words, Wu Qing learned her first powerful lesson in gender equality. That lesson was to guide her many years later in her crusade to help the women of China secure their rightful place in society.

Wu Qing was fortunate to have been born into a family that made no distinction between male and female in terms of duties, rights, opportunities, and privileges. Her maternal grandfather was an Imperial Navy officer and fought the Japanese during the Sino-Japanese War. He also served as president of a naval academy in Yantai. His wife, in contrast, wrote poetry and told her daughter, Xie Wanying, that she should have not only a family but a profession as well.

The couple eschewed many Chinese traditions of child rearing. For example, Xie Wanying, who was born in the twentieth century, was spared the Chinese traditions of binding a girl's feet and piercing her ears. When she was growing up, her father always introduced her as "my daughter, as well as my son." He relished dressing her up in a naval captain's uniform and taught her how to ride a horse and row boats.

Both Xie Wanying and her husband, Wu Wenzao, became involved in the first student democratic movement in China, she in fact more than he. Xie Wanying had wanted to become a doctor, but because of her student activism she missed too many of her laboratory classes; she shifted to her school's Chinese Department. In 1923, she sailed to the United States to pursue a graduate degree at Wellesley College. On that slow boat to America, she met the man who would become her husband. Wu Wenzao was also Western-educated, with B.A. and M.A. degrees from Dartmouth and a Ph.D. from Columbia University. An accomplished sociologist and anthropologist, he was one of the founders of sociology in China.

Xie Wanying returned to China in 1926, and Wu Wenzao followed three years later. They married and had three children, the youngest of whom, Wu Zongli (whose name would later be changed to Wu Qing), was born in Beijing on November 9, 1937. It was only natural that Xie Wanying would rear her children in the same liberal atmosphere she had grown up in.

Wu Qing's childhood remembrances are replete with fond memories of her mother's level-headed wisdom and guidance. Xie Wanying was well known as China's first children's writer. She started as a poet of vernacular rather than classical Chinese, but she later turned to writing simple but passionate prose using the pen name Bin Xin, meaning "ice heart." Her career spanned seventy-five years and her works are said to have influenced eight to nine generations of Chinese. Despite the demands of her profession, however, she managed to devote time and attention to her family, especially to her children.

Wu recalls that between her parents, it was her mother who was the disciplinarian, but a "very kind" one. Wu paints a picture of her mother's brand of discipline: "When I was a little girl, she said that we should never bully children who are younger than we are. We should always tell the truth. We should never swear. Whenever I did, she would use soap to clean my mouth." It was also her mother who taught Wu that she should never feel

inferior to boys. As a result, she never felt she was less than any boy, especially after she realized that she could do many things faster and better than they could, including climbing trees. Still, she says, she had to practice and work hard. She developed a strong will and perseverance.

Wu's father taught at Yanjing University from 1929, when he returned to China from the United States, until 1938. When the Japanese occupied Beijing in 1938, Wu's parents left Yanjing University for an American campus that the Japanese could not enter. Wu had just been born, so they waited until she was old enough to travel. When she was eight months old, her parents moved first to Hong Kong and then to Vietnam with their brood and two of Wu's aunts. From Vietnam, the family wanderers took a train to Yunnan. For a time, Wu Wenzao taught at the Yunnan University in Kunming. But the family eventually moved on to Chongqing, the wartime capital of Jiang Jieshi's (Chiang Kai-shek) Guomindang (Kuomintang) government. While there, Wu Wenzao became ill with pneumonia and needed injections of penicillin, which were expensive. To raise the money, Xie Wanying decided to write a book about women, using a male pseudonym. With the royalties she received for the book, she was able to buy the medicines her husband needed.

Wu Qing's memories of Chongqing are bittersweet. Even though she was a small child then, she remembers the Japanese bombings "because they came practically every day. At that time, the Chinese army was poorly equipped. The Japanese bombers flew so low that their national emblem could be seen clearly." Her mother, though, was always prepared for them. She had a bag ready with a kerosene lamp, first-aid kit, and food for her children. At the first sign of bombardment, she would herd her family into the air-raid shelter. At one time, the bombs were dropped while Wu was suffering from pneumonia. Her mother, fearing that Wu would die inside the air-raid shelter, waited until the last minute to join the two other children there. It soon became too dangerous for them to stay outside the shelter, and so her mother carried Wu inside the shelter and there they stayed for a couple of hours. On that day, eight children were evacuated to the shelter. All but Wu died. The experience was so terrifying, says Wu, that even after the war was over, her face would turn gray every time she heard the drone of airplanes.

Despite such grim memories, Wu cherishes happy ones of her childhood in Chongqing. She remembers the family home: "It was a bungalow . . . made of mud. There were five rooms with a kitchen in the back. The front door opened into our dining room and living room. . . . I still remember the arrangement . . . the place was always very clean, very neat, because of my mother. And whenever I was ill, there would always be flowers there because my mother would go out to pick wild flowers. Before I went to school . . . every day I would sit under the roof with my mother and [she] would tell me stories and . . . take me for walks around the house and then go down the mountains. That was beautiful." Her mother told Wu and her sister the story of David Copperfield and sometimes made up stories of her own that always carried a lesson, such as that children should be clean and brave and should respect others and behave themselves.

Some of Wu's wartime memories are now a source of amusement. She says, "Because of the war and because my daddy couldn't make a lot of money and my mom wasn't working, we would have meat dishes only during the weekends. Very often, my brother and I would be fighting over the meat dish. And he would say, 'Hey you, sit down.' But I wouldn't budge."

Wu began her schooling in Chongqing. The early years were unremarkable. Unlike her elder sister who was always first in her class, Wu never cared about being on top. Moreover, she hated being disciplined in school; she thought it was "awful." It was the social activities in school she was always very enthusiastic about. When she was in the

first grade, her school launched a fund-raising drive for war veterans. She raised the biggest amount by going to the homes of the landlords, some of whom knew her parents. One day a homeowner told her she had already gone there that morning. Her quick reply was, "You didn't give me enough. I need more." Her persistence paid off.

Immediately after the war, Wu's mother sent the two older children back to Beijing to continue their education. Wu, who was now eight, stayed in Nanjing with a distant relative for about three months. Two incidents during this period left a deep impression on her. One rainy day an American GI drove past her in a jeep, splashing her with water; he turned his head and merely laughed. This made her feel "like an animal or something." On another occasion, her mother took a flight from Shanghai to Tokyo. No passenger planes were available at the time and she had to hitch a ride on a U.S. bomber. Passengers were required to wear parachutes. Wu's mother told an American flier that it would be awkward for her to wear one because she was wearing a cheongsam. He looked at her and rudely remarked, "I don't want to look at your legs." Wu also recalls having been told that in Shanghai a park carried a sign saying, "No Chinese and dogs allowed." "Americans were supposed to be our allies," she thought then, "but that was the way they treated the Chinese at the time."

From Nanjing, Wu went to Shanghai where she attended a public school, while living in Pudong with an uncle and his family.

On her birthday in 1946, Wu flew with her family to Tokyo, Japan. General Zhu Shiming, a West Point graduate and one of her father's best friends, became the head of the Chinese Mission to Japan. He asked Wu Wenzao, in turn, to lead the political group of the Mission.

Upon arriving in Japan, Wu was shocked to see that most of the houses had been leveled to the ground. The members of the Chinese Mission, however, were given proper housing in a two-story building in Azabuku, where the foreign diplomats resided. Wu's mother, for her part, established a school for about fifteen children of members of the Chinese delegation and served as the school's principal. Wu continued her education in Chinese in this school. When she finished the sixth grade in 1949, she and her sister, who had joined the family in Japan the year before, were enrolled in the International School of the Sacred Heart, an English-language school. By that time, Wu already knew some English. Her mother had prepared her by making her take English classes three times a week under a tutor.

In Japan, Wu learned from her mother her first lesson in reaching out to people. It would serve her well in her adult life. She narrates, "I refused to play with any Japanese children when I first got there. . . . I organize[d] Chinese children, all boys, and every day we would go out to frighten away the Japanese children. When my mother found out, she had a very serious talk with me, saying that, 'You have to know that during the war, the Japanese people and the Chinese people both suffered. It was only the Japanese militarists who had come to kill the Chinese.' Then I started to play with the Japanese children. So I learned to draw the line between the government and the people." She learned from her mother's example as well the virtue of helping out others in need, regardless of race and political beliefs. Every Thursday, Xie Wanying would invite her Japanese friends from Wellesley College to lunch. She would also prepare something for them to take home because during that period the Japanese were surviving on rations.

Living in Japan during the American occupation gave Wu a taste of American culture. Her family had American friends, got all its supplies from PX (post exchange) stores, went to an American film theater, sang American songs, and read the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper. "Everything was American" during that period, she says. She even memorized the names of America's forty-eight states, but not the provinces of China.

In 1949, upon the founding of the People's Republic of China, Wu Wenzao decided to leave his post at the Chinese Mission to work as a journalist in Tokyo. The family moved to a two-story building with a little garden in Shinjuku. They were unable to travel because the Guomindang government—now based in Taiwan—refused to issue them passports. Worse, the Guomindang sent agents to check on Wu Wenzao. On one such visit, Wu Qing was in her father's study. She warned the visitors, "Don't touch my daddy's books." Among the books was *Three Years in Moscow,* by Anna Louise Strong, anathema to the bitterly anticommunist Guomindang. The agents went so far as to interrogate the maids and the chauffeur about the family's activities. Their anxiety was understandable, for, as Wu remembers, "My daddy had already gotten in touch with the Communist Party in Tokyo and then with Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai] in China. We had been getting newspapers and periodicals and letters from relatives and friends in China saying that the communist party was really good and caring for the people. A lot of people said the same thing. It was not propaganda. I think the Guomindang sensed that."

It was not until Wu Wenzao received an invitation to teach at Yale University in the United States that the Guomindang government issued passports to his family. He and his wife, however, were not enthusiastic about the offer to move to America. Having seen how easily their children absorbed the American way of life, they feared that they might forget their home country. Wu Wenzao declined the offer from Yale and decided instead to take his family back to China.

The decision to return to a communist China was not an easy one. Wu Wenzao at first thought of going to India, where he had many friends from the academe. Wu remembers that her parents had "a lot of talks" behind closed doors. She knew that they never entertained the thought of going to Taiwan; at the same time, her father was worried that, because of his background as a Western-trained intellectual and professor of sociology, the Communist Party might not like him. Xie Wanying was more determined to go back. Many of their intellectual friends had remained in China. Moreover, some of their best friends in the United States had returned to China and assured them that the Party was much better than the Guomindang and that it was safe for them to go home.

Thus, in August 1951, Wu's family went to Hong Kong and from there took a boat to Guangdong. Wu recalls that on the boat ride home a song about the new China called "Singing the Praises of the Country" was playing over the loudspeaker. "There were tears in my parents' eyes," she remembers, and in hers, too. She was thirteen years old. They were happy to be back in China, especially when Mao Zedong announced that China had stood up to the Western imperialists; there would be no imperialists remaining in China. Wu says, "I had the feeling I would not be looked down upon by anybody anymore."

Wu's family moved back to Beijing in December 1951. They soon realized that life in the new China was not easy. For some time, Wu's parents stayed home to write about themselves, particularly their past. They also studied Mao Zedong's works and learned Russian. At this time, the Party began reviewing their backgrounds to "see whether they could be trusted." Wu's mother was assigned to be a member of the China Writers' Association, with the status of a professional writer. In 1953, her father was appointed professor at the Institute of National Minorities.

Meanwhile, in 1952 Wu and her sister resumed their schooling. They now attended the No. 13 Girls' School where tuition was free and students paid only for their meals. Both girls had to change their names in order to disguise their identities. They presented themselves as overseas Chinese and told people their parents were in the field of trade and commerce in Japan. The family was concerned not only for their own safety but for that of Wu Wenzao's comrades in the Guomindang government who had been left behind in Tokyo.

Wu says she had the best teachers in this school. They were “so good professionally as well as academically,” she says. “And they had a sense of integrity and were good role models for us.” Most of these teachers had graduated from famous universities and colleges but were not allowed to teach in Chinese universities because of their “impurities.” Since English was banned at the time, students learned Russian instead. Wu was exposed to Russian literature translated into Chinese. The school also had a variety of extracurricular activities such as singing, dancing, basketball, and volleyball.

As a boarding student, Wu learned to be independent and self-reliant. Once accustomed to having servants around, she now did her own laundry and took care of other students. Encouraged by her mother’s example, she took it upon herself to look after some overseas Chinese students from Indonesia.

Patriotic sentiments ran high at the school. Wu joined the Youth League, an organization for teenage children similar to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Later on, she also applied for membership in the Communist Party but was turned down because of her family background and her father’s connection to the Guomindang government.

Students at the time were also being taught to be “all-around persons for the country.” Wu explains, “Mao said that there are Three Goods: you have to be physically strong, study well, and work hard.” The youth were taught to serve the people, to follow regulations, and to be kind to one another. The motivation to be of service to the people helped Wu excel in school. In contrast to her unremarkable early school years, she now consistently became the best student in her level. She had found a reason to be well educated: “If I didn’t have skills, if I didn’t have education, I would not be able to serve the people.”

Upon graduation in 1957, Wu proceeded to study at the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute (which later became the Beijing Foreign Studies University). Premier Zhou Enlai had a hand in her choice of school. Her parents got to know him when they were in Japan. After they returned to China, Zhou invited them to have dinner with him. He learned that Wu and her sister had been trained in English in Japan; he suggested that they be encouraged to take up foreign languages. At the time, four main languages were being taught at the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute: English, French, German, and Spanish. Wu chose to specialize in English. She took skills courses such as pronunciation, oral conversation, and writing, as well as literature classes, consisting mostly of the study of British literature—since most of her professors had graduated from England.

Wu entered the institute in the autumn, just as China’s 1957 anti-rightist movement was coming to an end. The movement had struck close to home. Her father had been labeled a rightist and was eventually stripped of his teaching job and made chief librarian of the Institute for National Minorities. Her brother was also labeled a rightist; he was sent to do hard labor on a farm. Wu Qing knew that, to avoid suspicion, she had to balance her academic life with political involvement. She became the Youth League secretary of her class, a position reserved for the best students. She also became involved in social work. Studying was considered personal, but social work was part of the Party’s work. Wu, thus, attended classes in the morning but devoted her afternoons and evenings to politics. In response to Mao’s call for students to start factories, in 1958 Wu set up a tile-making factory. Acting as manager herself, she employed more than fifty students from the English Department, working in three shifts. Besides setting up the factory, Wu joined other young people in tree-planting expeditions to the mountains. It was her first exposure to rural life.

In 1960, as Wu was preparing to specialize in a second foreign language, she was invited to join the faculty of the institute. The year before, a split had occurred between the former Soviet Union and China. As a result, 350 Chinese students who had been preparing to go to Russia were unable to leave; they had to be absorbed by the English Department.

The upsurge in enrollment prompted the institute to invite Wu to teach, despite the fact that she had not yet acquired a graduate degree. Her father was against the idea, but Wu's position was that "whatever the Party wants us to do, we should do it and do it well." She was honored to be asked by the Party to teach.

Wu was assigned the sophomore classes. Her full schedule allowed her barely five or six hours of sleep. To improve her teaching style, she sat in on the classes of the two best teachers and, in time, developed her own teaching methodology. She realized that to teach English, it was best to compare and contrast English with Chinese. She made her students aware of the differences and similarities between the two languages, and cultures as well. Because lessons in pronunciation tended to be very dull, she strove to make her classes interesting. She paid particular attention to her handwriting in class and always double-checked everything she wrote on the blackboard, to make sure it was clear and correct. She made it a point to summarize her lessons for her students. She kept a record of the problems she encountered while teaching and their possible solutions. She also tutored her students, especially those from remote rural areas who usually spoke with thick local accents.

Wu taught her students more important lessons outside her English classes. The most important of these was nationalism. She also taught her students "how to be a good person." She is proud to say that she always had a good relationship with them. "I loved my students," she says, and so, "they loved me."

As if the sixteen hours a week she spent in the classroom were not enough, Wu also put in time at the institute's trade union and organized extracurricular activities. She directed plays and helped students learn English songs and poems. Under her guidance, they held an "English Evening" every semester.

Wu was a young teacher when she caught the eye of a young colleague named Chen Shu. They had worked together at the tile-making factory, where he was an accountant; at the time, however, they did not get to know each other well. Chen Shu entered the graduate program of the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute after finishing his college education in 1959 and then joined the faculty of the institute's English Department. He and Wu were married in 1964. The following year, their marriage was blessed with a son. Wu describes her husband as "very kind, down to earth, and willing to share and help."

They shared a "common language," says Wu, referring not to English but to the fact that both of them came from families of intellectuals. Chen Shu's father had studied biology at the University of Chicago, and, like Wu's father, later came back to China to teach and serve.

Wu was just settling down to her new life as a teacher, wife, and mother when the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution swept China in 1966. It was said that the aims were to revitalize the revolutionary values of the new generation of Chinese and to eliminate differences between urban and rural areas, workers and peasants, and mental and manual labor.

Mao ordered schools closed prior to the official launching of the Cultural Revolution in May 1966. Proponents of the movement targeted intellectuals, authors, scholars, propagandists, and people in leading positions. Students held mass meetings with the encouragement of the Party's top officials. *Dazibao,* or "big character posters," criticizing university officials and professors were circulated throughout China from the principal campuses in Beijing, which was the hub of the movement.

Wu's family was not spared. She recalls that the Red Guards went to her parents' apartment, took away all their possessions, locked most of the rooms, and left them only one room of less then ten square meters to live in. The students also installed posters criticizing Wu Wenzao and Xie Wanying, particularly the latter's friendship with Dr. John

Leighton Stewart. Stewart, an American missionary, had been the founding president of Yanjing University and served as the last U.S. ambassador to China before the communist triumph in 1949.

Life at the institute became more difficult for Wu when the Cultural Revolution began. She came under suspicion herself because of her family background and found many organizations' doors closed to her. "I fell into a kind of abyss," she says, "because nobody wanted me, although I used to be very popular." One day the Red Guards descended on her room and took away some of her belongings: she had opposed the "invasion" of the institute by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and workers and had spoken out against the mayor. She was forced to live with students for some time. She was terrified the first time a meeting was held to criticize her publicly—a common ritual of the Cultural Revolution. She says, "I had to appear and stand up in front and lower my head. Then the students would shout slogans. But then, after the meeting, when there weren't any PLA soldiers and workers around and they saw me, they said, 'Professor, we have to do it.' I said, 'I understand.' From then on, I wasn't afraid anymore. In a way, I was toughened during that period."

Ironically, when the Cultural Revolution started, Wu had wanted to be part of it. She was sympathetic to its ideology and had full trust in Mao Zedong. "I thought whatever Mao said was right. China should change and we should get rid of feudalism. And I thought that China would be embarking on a brighter road for the people," she says. She tried to reconcile her belief in Mao's ideology with her love for her parents: "I always loved my parents. I thought to myself . . . my parents took us back to try to help build a new China. They loved the country. They might have had some ideas that did not fit what the Party wanted, but they were definitely not enemies." Her mother, for example, was accused of being an imperialist spy during the Cultural Revolution; this was because she traveled abroad frequently. The truth was, says Wu, that she had been chosen by the Party itself to make these trips to promote literary linkages between China and other countries such as India.

After all the "struggle meetings," Wu was sent to an army farm to be further reformed and to teach English to the graduates of the university in 1968, while her husband and son remained in Beijing. At the army farm, she had to render one hour of service on weekdays and three hours on weekends. She worked in the paddy fields with her students for about a year. She went back to Beijing in 1969 and then joined her colleagues in doing physical labor at a May Seventh Cadre School in Shayang, Hubei, aiming at "transforming intellectuals through physical labor." She learned to grow rice and peanuts and enjoyed life there, as it was much, much better than being condemned and struggled against without any legal evidence. In 1969, her parents, in their late sixties, were also forced to go to a farm in rural Hubei to perform physical labor; they learned to grow cotton.

Wu remained for one year in Hubei, where she suffered from a disorder of the nerve system of the left side of her body, due to hard labor and malnutrition. In addition to hard labor, Wu was also assigned to teach English to some teachers from local schools. In 1970, the Foreign Languages Institute became one of the first schools to reopen. China at the time was preparing to join the United Nations and needed trained interpreters. As Wu resumed teaching at the institute, she realized the imprint of the Cultural Revolution on education: "We were asked to use the *Peking Review* and newspaper articles to teach students English. That is why the students of those years didn't know any of the basic vocabulary that was closely related of the lives of people, like bread, butter, cheese, milk, cars, and buses. These words were capitalistic. They knew 'revisionism,' 'imperialism,' 'socialism.'" For a time, periodicals and books from foreign sources were not allowed.

Thus, the English Department encouraged the students to read whatever they could find. Gradually, Wu started to encourage her students to read novels.

Soon, she was reunited with her family and their lives returned to normal. Neither she nor her parents felt bitter over what happened to them during the Cultural Revolution, she says.

In 1979, Wu's life took an unexpected turn. She was chosen to teach English on television. She believes she was selected for the job because "I was one of the best young teachers. I was very creative and I could think of different ways of teaching." She had acted in a local production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest,* and she had a gift for translating words into action. Along with another faculty member of her choice, Wu taught on television for two years. The work hours were long and the job itself was difficult. One half-hour program sometimes took an entire day to shoot. The television stint made Wu quite popular, though, and her parents were very proud. People recognized her wherever she went, and she received ten to twenty letters daily from viewers. Wu enjoyed television work and saw it as a form of public service, reaching out to millions upon millions of viewers who were eager to make up for what they had been deprived of during the Cultural Revolution: the right to study. To better help the students, the people behind the production set up two experimental test groups to whom they showed each program and then gathered feedback. Wu visited these test groups once a week to ask the students what they had learned from the program and what problems they encountered. Their problems and questions were then incorporated into an additional program after each lesson.

While Wu was teaching English on television, she was still teaching four hours a week at the institute. In 1979, after two years on television, differences with her co-host led her to quit and to become a full-time teacher again. In June 1980, however, her mother suffered a stroke; in September, she broke her hip. This left her in need of a family member to take care of her as she went through a major operation. At her request, the China Writers' Association wrote a letter to the institute, asking it to let Wu stay with her for one year. While Wu was at the hospital taking care of her mother, she took time to do a lot of reading: textbooks on sociology, social issues, and world history—all of which helped her in her teaching as well as in understanding the world and important issues. Wu also went back to her high school to help with English instruction and teacher training. After a year, one of her best friends, Zheng Gang, who was then the Party secretary of the English Department of the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, persuaded Wu to return to teaching. She reminded her that she was a teacher and that if she wanted to advance in her career, she had to go back to the classroom.

Wu found a solution to her dilemma when the eldest sister of her husband arrived for a visit. She gradually assumed the role of caregiver to Xie Wanying, freeing Wu to resume her teaching career.

In 1982, Wu was offered an opportunity to study for a year at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States. She attended the Community Fellows Program at MIT, taking courses in U.S. history, American film, urban issues, and, most importantly, women's studies. It was her first encounter with a course on women's issues. It is to her experience at MIT that she traces the genesis of her interest in active political life. She tended to compare the situation of women in China with that of other countries, according to what she was learning from her American professor who was from Wellesley College, and she discovered "that there were more similarities than differences. Women are usually second-class citizens in their own countries, whether they like it or not." Wu

brought this realization back with her to China. In 1985, she helped organize the Women's Studies Forum, a pioneering women's group and one of China's earliest nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), together with Professor Isabel Crook from Beijing Foreign Studies University and Marilyn Young, then a visiting American professor from New York University. Professor Crook invited some of the women teachers in the English Department to attend the forum and talk about themselves, their upbringing and personal experiences. Among the group's initial activities were discussions of films they had watched together, articles read, and lectures by foreign women who were visiting Beijing.

Those sessions helped the group to identify women's issues and concerns. For one of their projects, the participants analyzed the pictures and contents of eleven elementary Chinese textbooks published in 1982 by the People's Publishing House with a gender perspective. Their discoveries were revealing of the status of women in Chinese society. Wu says:

> *We found that only about one-fifth of the plates (illustrations) contained women. Women can only be peasants, textile workers, nurses, grandmothers, mothers, and street sweepers. But men can be leaders, scientists, army people, workers, tractor drivers, doctors, and pilots. We also found out that having a job does not necessarily indicate equality between men and women. Women are actually in dead-end jobs with low pay, long working hours, manual work, and harsh working conditions with little education. They have very few opportunities to be promoted. Yet, many women still do not sense it. They think a job, earning a salary is something that makes them equal to men. They do not think about possibilities of getting promotion and fringe benefits. Actually, in China, students graduating in the same year get the same pay whether they are male or female. And yet, the men get promoted faster and easier and there is a disparity in fringe benefits.*

Building from these discussion sessions and negotiations with the head of the English Department, some members of the group offered China's first university course on feminism in English in the spring of 1988. The course was intercollegiate, international, and interdisciplinary. Wu taught "Women and Politics" and "Women and Education."

At about the same time that Wu became involved in women's advocacy, politics also beckoned. In 1984, she was elected to the position of people's deputy for the Haidian District People's Congress, her local legislative body. It was not the first time she contemplated becoming a politician. In 1980, some of the young teachers at the institute had asked her if she wanted to run for people's deputy. Although the idea appealed to her, she was caring for her mother and she could not quit teaching.

By 1984, however, there was no stopping Wu anymore. The qualifications for the position fit her perfectly: a woman, middle-aged, an excellent teacher, not a Party member. Her opponent was a teacher from the Japanese Department. Wu's reputation for fairness and her involvement in the university's trade union won her the election. She received close to five thousand votes from the university community—students, teachers, staff members, and their dependents.

Buckling down to work, Wu began her tenure as people's deputy with a careful study of the Constitution. She likes to say, "My power comes from the Constitution; my strength comes from my constituents." Her constituents today are wont to describe her as "the people's deputy who always carries the Constitution in her hands." This is because she is the first deputy who has used the Constitution to protect the rights of her constituents.

It is the job of people's deputies to hold the departments of government accountable to their local constituencies, thus ensuring that the system of checks and balances is in place. Articles 76 and 77 of the Chinese Constitution also state that the national people's deputies should keep in close contact with their constituencies. Wu believed that she needed to maintain a close relationship with her constituents so that she could voice out their suggestions and concerns to the government. For this purpose, she talked to the leadership and asked for a room at the school so that she could use every Tuesday afternoon, from 4:00 to 5:30, as her "consultation time." She is the first deputy in China to hold individual conferences with constituents and has been doing it since 1984. Having no assistant, she took her own notes during consultations, although her husband and her son occasionally helped out. To ensure transparency, she gave reports of her work to her constituents. Again, she was the first to do so.

During her first three-year term, she met hundreds of her constituents and helped solve all kinds of problems, from curbing traffic violations in the district and making sure that public toilets were repaired to helping retired workers process their pensions. Since then, people have been coming to her in droves, some even waiting out her morning exercise for a chance to speak to her. Her telephone at home has become a hotline, available to her constituents at any time of the day.

Wu has been reelected six times as a people's deputy for the Haidian District People's Congress. In 1988, she was also elected to the Beijing Municipal People's Congress. It was that same year, at the first session of the Ninth Beijing Municipal People's Congress, that she earned a reputation as a "controversial person." At the time, the concept of democratic politics was just emerging in China. People were not accustomed to expressing their opinions freely, especially in the political sphere. At the opening session of the Beijing People's Congress, Wu abstained from voting twice when the agenda and membership in the presidium were being decided. In the first instance, she did not think the agenda provided time for deputies to speak. In the second, she believed that some members of the presidium were not qualified, owing to old age, poor health, and mistakes made during the Cultural Revolution.

Later on, she voted against the nomination lists for two important committees: one tasked to review proposals put forward by deputies on behalf of their constituents and the other to examine the plan for municipal economic and social development. According to article 3 of the Constitution, "All administrative, judicial and procuratorial organs of the state are created by the people's congresses to which they are responsible and by which they are supervised." She believed that government officials should not be part of the committees because the government is the executive organ while the People's Congress is the supervisory organ. Executives, she argued, should not act as their own supervisors.

Wu was alone in her abstentions and nays. She recalls the experience: "I had to raise my hands in front of 885 deputies. I didn't know I was the only one. After it was announced that the meeting was over, I turned to go. Nobody left his/her seat. It suddenly dawned on me that people just wanted to know who dared to cast the 'against' and 'abstention' votes. So, I lifted my head and walked out. When I was out of the big hall, the journalists and deputies came out, shook my hands, and said, 'Wu Qing, you were great! You make me feel that there is freedom in China.'" She has been "a controversial person" since then because, she says, "some people thought I was against the Party or the government."

Wu, who is outspoken and inquisitive, also dispensed her duties as a people's deputy in an unconventional manner. A host of anecdotes demonstrate her frank and questioning nature. As a newly elected deputy, she heard the emcee introduce a cadre as "the son of so-and-so." Immediately she stood up and said: "You should not introduce a cadre in such a

manner. We want to know his own achievements in his office." She also makes it a point to sit by the microphone so that she can be the first speaker at congress meetings.

Her habit of speaking her mind has unsettled many of her colleagues and earned her a number of opponents. Chinese society disdains confrontations, and people prefer to "read between the lines." Even Wu's academic career suffered because of her involvement in the student movement of 1989 and her general outspokenness. She was not allowed to leave the country for three years. Moreover, the Party committee of the university tried in every way to prevent her from being reelected, and she did not achieve full professorship until 1995, when she was fifty-eight years old, much later than many of her students who became teachers themselves. Professor Isabel Crook explains why some of Wu's colleagues frowned upon her habit of asking questions during assemblies. "To be elected to the Congress was such an honor," she says, that when the government made a report, "everyone would listen, thinking, 'What an honor to be told!'" Wu, in contrast, uses these opportunities to inquire about policies and other matters affecting her constituency, thus earning for herself the admiration and respect of throngs of supporters.

Wu also became a central figure in the students' restiveness that led to the massacre at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Along with some other teachers in the English Department, she supported the students' cause at the start. She biked to Tiananmen Square every day, spoke with and listened to the students. She persuaded them to use the legal measures available to seek change, rather than to take drastic action against the government. She became a leader on the campus but drew the line when the students went on a hunger strike. Her involvement was cut short when she was thrown off her bicycle one day and smashed her tailbone. Had she not been confined to her sickbed, she would have been at Tiananmen on the day government soldiers fired at the students. After the incident, the school Party committee asked everyone who had been involved in some way to report on their activities. Wu, having gone through the Cultural Revolution, was no longer afraid to speak of what she had done. She says, "Because I behaved the way I did, they did not dare touch me. You have to be strong."

Her involvement in politics did not prevent Wu from continuing her work with women. In May 1989, she became a consultant to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). She began to work with rural women, a mission that linked her to some of China's far-flung, poverty-stricken areas in the summer of 1990. She went to Huining County, one of the poorest parts of Gansu Province in northwestern China, to inspect the conditions of rural women and to help implement a CIDA aid project for women's development in needy areas.

That visit made the word "poverty" real to Wu. She recalls images from that fateful trip: "Entering one village, I saw quite a few imbeciles sitting on the ridges of poorly grown wheat fields; there were also many illiterates, especially among women. I happened to visit a family of three living in a small straw hut with a kitchen inside. The husband told me that he considered himself lucky, as he had bought himself a wife with $50 and she had given him a son. His six brothers—like many middle-aged bachelors in the countryside—were too poor to set up families for themselves. The wife herself was happy; she had come from an even poorer village."

Were it not for that visit, Wu says, poverty would have remained "an abstract and dead word to me, seen only in films and books." At that point, she realized that women bear the brunt of poverty because of their low social status. "Some of them didn't even have a proper name; they were known as so-and-so's mother, or wife. Their job was to give birth

to children, especially sons, and to take care of the family. On top of all that, they had to work in the fields. I was stunned and flabbergasted when I saw my 'sisters' living in such conditions. Tears welled up in my eyes."

Visiting factories and schools, Wu checked the number of latrines and found that fifty-five women had to share one hole, while the ratio for men was 2.4 to one latrine. In one village in Gansu, she knocked on a door and was greeted by a woman who told her no one was in. "She did not consider herself a human being," Wu says, "because she could not read and write. I cried immediately because that was my sister. I want my sisters to be treated like me."

Such disheartening realizations only served to strengthen Wu's resolve to work for women's rights. She says, "I was not disillusioned or disappointed with the people or the work done by local village committees. On the contrary, I felt proud of them for fighting so hard under such conditions." She now launched herself "on a whirlwind, decade-long voyage" that has shown her "both the depth of problems facing poor Chinese women and their amazing strength in overcoming challenges."

As Wu set out to fulfill her mission of helping women at the grass roots, she realized that she was in for an uphill climb. Raising public awareness of women's issues in China is arduous work. Wu believes that change in her country should begin in the rural areas, where much of the population lives. A great majority of them are poorly educated. Women make up 70 percent of China's illiterates. For her country to change, she says, "China has to change the rural areas, and to do that, you have to change women."

As an educator, Wu puts her faith in the liberating quality of education in solving the problems of China's women. She believes that "to educate a woman is to educate a family, possibly even generations of people. When a mother benefits from education, she can impart her knowledge to her children and she will do her best to make sure they have access to schooling, no matter whether they are boys or girls." Voicing this idea in and out of the country, Wu appealed to governments and international organizations all over the world to secure aid for programs for the development of women. Once she had the necessary funds, she and members of Rural Women Knowing All, an NGO that has been working for rural women since 1993, traveled to remote, backwater areas and visited women in their homes, finding out about their experiences, hardships, and needs. On all her trips, she imparted many important lessons: that men and women should have equal rights and status; that women must learn to read and write; and that women are indispensable contributors to a society's well-being and deserve to have their legal rights and interests respected and upheld.

The projects with the grass roots include literacy, microcredit, gender, and legal training. In a township in Hebei Province and a county in Sichuan Province, Wu even conducted training classes for female village and township heads with their male counterparts as well. The NGO also implemented small-loan projects in some poor mountainous areas. In Hubei Province, she and her colleagues ran experimental literacy classes for half a year. They also trained medical workers for ethnic women in remote areas of Guizhou Province. A public servant at heart, she also reads and explains the Constitution to rural women.

Wu was also an adviser to a women's hotline in the capital city. Launched in late 1992, the hotline provides answers to a variety of women's questions about Chinese law, family planning, child care, and other matters. In 1998, the Beijing municipal government approved Wu and her peer deputies' motion to set up a women's bureau in Haidian District. The bureau is the first agency to take special responsibility for women's affairs at the grass roots.

Wu has also toured the length and breadth of China to speak before women's federations at the county and township levels. She remains a consultant for CIDA. She has run gender-sensitivity and citizenship workshops in factories and rural areas and given lectures at many universities. In her talks, she always encourages women to improve themselves and participate in village elections. She urges them to dare to run for office. When they do, she helps them design their campaigns and draft their speeches. A dynamic speaker, Wu never fails to inspire her listeners and make them feel empowered. In fact, some women in the places she visited have been elected to village committees.

Wu's reputation as a feminist extends beyond China's boundaries. She is equally active in international women's activities, an involvement that was enhanced by a year as a Fulbright scholar at Stanford University in 1993–1994. She participated in the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1994–1995 and served as facilitator in two of its workshops. She served on the board of the Global Fund for Women based in San Francisco from 1996 to 2002. In 2003, the Schwab Foundation Network chose her as an "outstanding social entrepreneur." Today, she is a board member of the Beijing Cultural Development Center for Rural Women, as well as of Gender Action based in Washington, D.C. She is also president of the Women's World Summit Foundation, based in Geneva; honorary chair of the Women Interchange Network, based in San Francisco; and jury member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Unesco) International Award on Peace Education, from 2006 to 2010.

Wu's international reputation serves her causes well. She is able to secure financial and technical assistance from international donors for women's groups. Through her efforts, for instance, the Chengdu Institute of Economic Management acquired financial help from the Global Fund for Women to support projects for rural Yi and Miao minority women and village teachers in Sichuan Province.

Wu, the sexagenarian, remains involved in her work as people's deputy and woman's advocate. She serves as an advisor to *Rural Women Knowing All* (now called *Rural Women*), a magazine catering to China's rural women founded by Xie Lihua. She also chairs the Beijing Practical Skills Training Center, founded in 1998. The center is the only nonprofit, nondegree institution that specifically trains women who work as cadres for the All-China Women's Federation, as well as potential village heads, party secretaries, and other official posts. The center offers practical skills to girls from sixteen to twenty who have dropped out of high school due to poverty. Most of the teenagers are from the western and southwestern parts of China, where physical conditions are harsh and there is little or no infrastructure. It offers courses dealing with gender issues, citizenship, marketing, and practical skills such as computer use, hairdressing, sewing, and waitressing. To date, the center has trained over 5,400 women, young girls, and some men. Some of its students regard Wu as their "liberator." One of them professed: "After Professor Wu spoke in my village, I came to her school. She saved my life."

Active and vigorous, Wu still observes a packed schedule that would tire out the fittest of men. Most of her tasks are undertaken on behalf of others—a fact that gives her utmost fulfillment. She has played all her life's roles well and has gained the love, support, admiration, and recognition of everyone whose lives she has touched. This leads people to wonder: What more does she want? Does she not feel successful enough? Wu replies: "Everyone belongs to a larger group. I am a woman. Although I have been personally successful, women are still discriminated against in general and occupy an unequal position in real life. My personal achievements are not enough."

Since retiring from teaching in September 2000, Wu has focused greater attention on women's issues, human rights, and her duties as a people's deputy. Great obstacles, however, still need to be hurdled. After all, Wu's dream of establishing a rule of law and gender equality in China runs counter to a 2,400-year-old tradition of patriarchy and male dominance. Wu herself reckons that changes will come slowly. Fortunately, she is not alone in her struggle to achieve this dream.

Wu believes that women should have the spirit to unite, support each other, and draw strength from their unity. Seeing herself as a bridge, she links together women's groups and organizations in and out of China to achieve this goal. Her dream of gender equality may be a long way down the road, but with Wu Qing's guidance and inspiration, China's women have already set off on their journey, taking one small step at a time.

Lorna Kalaw-Tirol

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