

ON THE EVE OF THE EXPLOSION

BY FANG LIZHI

Fang Lizhi, the prominent astrophysicist accused by Chinese officials of being an instigator of the 1989 protests, recalls the events leading up to the tragedy of June 4th.

1989 had arrived. At the beginning of the year, a cold, pure white snow began falling softly on Beijing. No one would have guessed that in four months a great societal explosion would occur, and that the snow would give way to blood, carnage and death.

Perhaps by providence, I wrote my first article of 1989 on a sort of explosion: supernovae. My field of research was not at all related to them, but after Supernova 1987A appeared in the skies, supernovae were a hot topic all over the scholarly world. It seemed the general public—not just astronomers, but non-astronomers and even non-scientists—suddenly took a great interest in them. Many places were inviting astrophysicists to come and speak on supernovae. I, too, had been called upon several times. Because of all this attention, it was impossible not to devote at least a little time to the subject.

Nowadays, supernovae are a purely astronomical matter, but in Chinese history they were not just the province of astronomers—they were a concern of the humanities as well. Early in China's thousand years of history, supernovae came to occupy a place in the life of society. There are records of novae on oracle bones; attention was paid to these sorts of unusual heavenly phenomena in ancient China primarily for divination purposes. In the 2,000 years since the Han Dynasty, there have been six or seven spectacular supernovae. At its height, the supernova of AD 1006 shined as bright as the half-moon; you could read books by its radiance.

However, ancient astrological beliefs generally considered supernovae to be evil omens. These awesome apparitions were believed to augur military disaster, natural catastrophe or the death of the emperor. Furthermore, divination records indicated that each time a supernova appeared, its malefic omen came true. For example, during the 1054 supernova diviners forecasted the death of the emperor, and sure enough, Emperor Liao Xingzong was dead one year later. Of course, this could be mere coincidence, but the earnestness of the records shows the deference given to supernovae. Because of the

important status they held, each time a supernova was sighted the official responsible for divinations would approach the emperor and suggest a general full amnesty in order to move the spirits to lift the impending doom, lighten the curse and instead bring good fortune upon the land.

The Beijing Observatory, where I worked at the time, was in bygone times charged with observing heavenly phenomena for the purpose of forecasting and divination. Today, of course, it no longer has the duty or capability to predict the outcome of a regime's policies. But today's astronomers still have the obligation and the right to concern themselves with the future of their society. When I wrote my article on supernovae, I thought again of the ancient practice of general amnesty. In today's Chinese society, wasn't another general amnesty exactly what we needed? The atmosphere surrounding New Years intensified this notion even more.

Why can't relations among people always be as they are at the New Year? Why can't there always be more harmony, tolerance and forgiveness?

Why is it that only on special holidays people are able to transcend their differences and wish well of each other, while on other days they struggle, struggle, unceasingly struggle?

Why is it that for the sake of mere power and glory, people are willing to imprison indefinitely those who have already been deprived of all power and present no threat to society?

How can people call themselves ideologically advanced when they don't even have the decency of the emperors of a thousand years ago, who granted general amnesties for the good of the world?

With these questions in mind, when I had finished writing my supernovae article, I wrote a letter to Deng Xiaoping suggesting that he grant a general amnesty:

January 6, 1989

Central Military Commission

Dear Chairman Deng:

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, and the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement. There must be many events commemorating these important dates, but the people are perhaps more worried right now about the future than about the past.

In order to better evoke the spirit of these days, I earnestly suggest that on the fortieth anniversary of this nation's founding, you grant a full amnesty, especially for political prisoners such as Wei Jingsheng. Whatever one's assessment of Wei Jingsheng might be, a full pardon for people like him who have already served ten years in prison would certainly be considered consistent with a spirit of humanity.

This year also marks the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution. Thanks to the inspiration it provides, liberty, equality, fraternity and human rights have received increasing respect over the passing years. I reiterate my sincere hope that you will consider my suggestion so that respect for these values may grow even more in the future.

My best regards,

Fang Lizhi

I dropped the letter into a mailbox outside the Beijing Observatory that very afternoon, sending it on its way to the Communist Party headquarters. Later on, this letter was singled out by the authorities as one of the factors leading to the explosion of violence in Beijing.

I have to say, I never really expected my letter to be of much use. Tens of thousands of letters are sent to the central authorities every day, but the vast majority of them are destined to sink into oblivion unread. Chinese leaders don't respond to letters from the masses except to spread propaganda; often not even an acknowledgement of receipt is given. When I was a member of the Chinese Academy of Science, even my letters to the Director of the Academy often received no response, let alone a letter to Deng Xiaoping.

Even so, I still had a little bit of faith that Deng Xiaoping would pay some attention to my letter. After all, I was at that time one of the people that he was often "concerned about."

The next day was Saturday, January 7. Over the course of the day I had visits from two guests, which eventually ensured that my letter would attract attention. The first guest was Liu Da, an open-minded old Party cadre who had been the Party Committee Secretary at the University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) for many years. He saw a copy of my letter and expressed total agreement. He even went so far as to say, "They really should be set free!" Furthermore, he was willing to forward it to the highest levels of government. As a former member of the Central Advisory Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, he had access to very effective channels.

The other guest was Professor Perry Link. Perry was a new friend of mine; he had arrived in August of the previous year to take up a post in Beijing as the representative of the American Committee on Scholarly Communication with China. He conducted research on Chinese literature and was an editor of the Chinese periodical *Dongfang Jishi*. He had come to invite me to write something for the publication; I took the occasion to give him a copy of the letter to Deng Xiaoping. That very evening, Professor Link, with my permission, gave an English version of the letter to some reporters; in this way it became an open letter, and the probability that it would not be ignored increased a notch or two.

I later understood that Deng Xiaoping had definitely seen my letter. Of course, I received no letter in reply; in fact, there was no response at all.

Come spring, some of my co-workers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences began to compose their own open letters to the government petitioning for the pardon of prisoners of conscience. The first to make the effort was my old friend, Professor Xu Liangying¹ of the Institute of the History of Natural Sciences. When his letter was published, it included the signatures of more than 40 scholars in various fields of natural history and sociology.

Immediately thereafter, the poets Bei Dao and Lao Mu, along with some other young artists, came to my house and asked about my letter, and I gave them a copy. On February 13, they set out to write a letter to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress calling for a pardon of all political prisoners. I used my 286 computer to help them print out their drafts. Three days later, the letter by Bei Dao and the others was published with thirty-three signatures, mostly those of artists.

There is an old Chinese saying, "the limit on things is three." The highest authorities could no longer take these three open letters sitting down. The Judicial Bureau was the first to stand up and fight back with an official pronouncement that sending petitions threatened the independence of the Chinese judiciary. Apparently the People's Republic restricts the people's right to petition. Then the authorities began to subject the signatories of the letters to "education" or "re-education" one by one; some were urged to "purify their words," some just received warnings and some were openly monitored.

At that time the authorities did not come looking for me, the instigator. But of course the incident was recorded against me.

None of the amnesty petitions succeeded, but the horror they evoked among the authorities proved that political dissidents had become a pernicious societal "epidemic." Political oppression became worse and worse.

Just at the height of this "epidemic," the recently inaugurated American President, George Bush, visited China.

The U.S. had had plenty of experience with the issue of dissidents and human rights in the Soviet Union. But when it came to China they appeared to start from scratch and hold China to a different standard. The President was stuck in a dilemma: he could risk offending China by treating the Soviet Union's and China's human rights problems similarly, or he could avoid the question of human rights in China in order to maintain a cordial relationship between the two governments.

As it happened, the President's advisors thought of a way to try to satisfy all sides: they had him invite a few Chinese dissidents to attend his farewell banquet in Beijing. In Western culture, a dinner banquet is a formal, open occasion where one is expected to avoid touchy topics of conversation. By inviting Chinese officials and dissidents to attend the banquet, President Bush demonstrated his concern for human rights in China while making a point of not undermining the authority of China's leaders. It seemed a very enlightened compromise.

It was under these circumstances that my wife Li Shuxian

and I received an invitation from the U.S. Embassy requesting our presence on February 26 at the President's farewell feast. I found out later that the President had invited 500 guests to the event; if Li Shuxian and I had actually attended, we would have comprised just 0.4 percent of the total number. The President's advisors had clearly made very exacting calculations; there was no room for error.

But despite their precision, the advisors' calculations were still wrong. They forgot (or didn't know) about Chinese banquet traditions. China's history is full of big political banquets; many major events have been marked by banquets. This is why there are many more banquets in Chinese operas than in Shakespeare's plays. When a Chinese opera gets to the line, "Set out the drink, and set up the feast!" you can be pretty sure a major scene will follow.

So the question was, could the august nation of China really allow a President of the American Republic to turn a banquet into political theater? The President's Texas BBQ feast was held in the wrong place and for some of the wrong people. It was hard for China's leaders to accept the presence of political dissidents at a banquet where they were guests, even if dissidents constituted just 0.4 percent of the total. I knew what a serious matter this could be, so the day after I received the invitation, on February 23, I called the Foreign Relations Office of the Chinese Academy of Sciences to notify them. The subtext was, if the authorities didn't want me to accept the invitation, they should tell me so I could thank my hosts and decline in a timely manner. In all honesty, if they refused to let us attend it wouldn't necessarily have been a great loss. After all, this was really just a formal social event with little likelihood of substantive content.

Everyone knows that an experienced politician does not have to reveal his displeasure openly. It would be smarter to use a banquet occasion to present a tolerant, forgiving image. So I figured that if the authorities weren't going to let me attend, they would probably notify me through the Observatory or the Academy. Indeed, since 1986 that was exactly how I had been informed of various decisions to limit my activities; for example, when I was denied permission to leave the country, and when I was not allowed to travel to Hefei to participate in a scientific meeting, I found out through those channels.

Three days passed. By the time I was actually ready to leave for the banquet, I had received no sign, either overt or subtle, that I should decline the invitation. The Beijing Observatory had sent a car to take us to the banquet. What game were the authorities up to? For the moment, I had no way of guessing.

In fact, no one of normal intelligence would have guessed that the authorities would use five major tactics to attain a very simple goal: preventing us from attending the banquet.

The first tactic: Martial law and interception

On February 26 at 5:30 in the evening, Perry Link and his wife and the two of us rode in a car together from 916 Baofusi in Zhongguan Cun,² traveling eastward toward the Sheraton Great Wall Hotel. Eventually the driver told us that as soon as our car entered the road, he detected that we were being trailed. But he didn't tell us at that time.

Around 6:00 p.m. our car had reached the junction of San Huan Road near the Great Wall Hotel, only to find it closed off. More than a hundred police officers were spread across the road, glaring around like tigers and blocking the passage of any vehicles. At first we believed it was a security precaution relating to President Bush. Little did we guess that as soon as the police saw our car, they would immediately descend upon it and force us out, then disperse. It turned out that our car was the reason for the roadblock.

The second tactic: The Secret Service head directing operations at the scene

After we were obliged to leave our car, we tried to reach the Great Wall Hotel on foot, but were soon surrounded by a group of plainclothes police officers who blocked our path. The leader was a dark, coarse man who had obviously received special training; he came over and grabbed me and said, "I'm the head of the Secret Service security detail for the Bush visit. The American Secret Service gave me a name list, but you two are not on it, so you cannot attend the reception."

From this it is clear that the most senior bodyguard from China's Secret Service was not assigned to the VIPs that night.

The third tactic: Stopping public transport

Since we couldn't go forward, all we could do was go back. We decided to go to the American Embassy to request a correction to the so-called "Secret Service name list." At that time we could no longer find our car and driver, so we jumped into a taxi. That taxi drove a few hundred meters, only to be overtaken by a police vehicle, and we were again forced to get out. We had no other option but to go to a public transport stop and wait for a tram or bus. Even at that the police were faster than us; no matter which stop we went to, a police officer would appear about a hundred meters in advance of the stop to instruct the bus or tram not to stop to allow passengers on or off. The other passengers waiting with us at those stands had no idea what was going on, and were inconvenienced along with us.

The fourth tactic: Going on a walk with us

After abandoning the idea of public transport, we set off by foot for the embassy. By then it was around 7:00 p.m.; the sky was getting dark, and the temperature was dropping. The four of us were surrounded by police officers, both uniformed and plainclothes, who walked beside us while a police vehicle followed close by. At every corner there was a military three-wheeled motorcycle awaiting orders. There looked to be more than a hundred police officers, and possibly many more that we couldn't see.

The simple conclusion is that a particular dissident, or a free thinker, required the attention of 100 uniformed police officers.

At 8:30 we reached the diplomatic quarter and encountered a Canadian foreign affairs official, Mr. David Horley, and his wife. When the Horleys learned of our quandary, they immediately invited us to their home to sit down. The police were foiled in their attempts to "accompany" us further

because they could not force their way into a diplomat's home. But a police vehicle remained parked outside the door in a state of high alert.

The hardest to comprehend was the fifth and last tactic: Offering us an "escort" to our press conference.

From 8:30–9:30, during the hour we spent at the Horley's home, we contacted many journalists. At the banquet, many reporters had quickly noticed that Li Shuxian's and my places were empty and that something must have transpired. For that reason, we decided that our next stop would be the Shangri-la Hotel, where more than 100 journalists covering the Bush visit were staying. In this way we could let even more journalists know what had happened that day. We were certain that the authorities had listened in on our telephone call to the Shangri-la Hotel, so we were very worried that while traveling from Mr. Horley's home to the Shangri-la we would once more be intercepted by police and prevented from meeting reporters. And indeed, as soon as we were on the road police vehicles began following closely. But they didn't interfere with our route, and we arrived unimpeded at the Shangri-la Hotel. The most likely reason for this tolerance is that the authorities forgot to include journalists in their original plan. When a government that relies on central planning doesn't include something in its original plan, the police are unlikely to take initiatives.³

At 11:30 that night we held a press conference making public our "banquet" experience. The hard night's work of several hundred police officers had not been in vain; it ensured that my experience stole attention from the President's banquet in the next day's headlines.

After barring me from the banquet that night, the authorities' stepped up their efforts to "look after" me.

On the night of March 6, 1989, I took the Beijing-Shanghai express train south for the purpose of attending the annual conference of the Chinese Astronomical Society in Suzhou. Traveling with me were three colleagues from the Beijing Observatory, as well as Xiao Gu, a graduate student from the Chinese Academy of Sciences who had been my assistant when I was vice-president of the USTC. The night passed without incident, and at 10:00 the next morning our train pulled into the Shanghai train station.

As we alighted from the train, I saw three people come to greet me, while ignoring my four companions. The head of the greeting party was Yang Yiquan, the vice-director of the Purple Mountain Observatory.⁴ I realized that they had been sent by the authorities to "look after" me. Because Yang and the others were professional acquaintances of mine, I didn't wish to cause them any difficulties, and straightforwardly accepted their attentions, climbing into the car they arranged and immediately departing the controversial city of Shanghai for Suzhou.

Yang Yiquan was very frank. As soon as our sedan left the train station, he said, "Lao Fang, let's not release a nuclear bomb in Suzhou this time. We're old friends. Promise me."

Of course I understood what he meant by "nuclear bomb," and replied, "This time I'll only give you a Big Bang, not a nuclear explosion."

This was my policy in any case. Ever since a conference in Guangzhou in 1987, in order to prevent bringing trouble to my colleagues at astrophysics conferences, I would only read my papers and would say nothing current affairs. The Suzhou conference would of course be no exception, and apart from presenting a paper on the Big Bang theory, I had no other plans in Suzhou than to do some sightseeing and buy some dried tofu.

Unlike the Guangzhou conference, during the five days of the Suzhou conference, not only were all of my daily activities tracked (I was even accompanied on my sightseeing excursions), but many other people also received similar attention. During the entire duration of the conference, no other guests were present at our hotel. That was because the authorities had ordered the hotel management not to accept any other guests during those five days, and no one from outside was allowed into the hotel. The reason given publicly was that these astrophysicists carried out research on the stars and the universe that was extremely sophisticated and required confidentiality. Participants at the conference could not avoid a sense of euphoria over their enhanced social prestige.

But some people still got into trouble. There were two editors from a Shanghai educational publishing house who were doing business in Suzhou, and were staying at Suzhou University. One of these editors had been responsible for publishing my book, *A Bird's Eye View of the Frontiers of Astrophysics*.⁵ When they learned I was in Suzhou, they invited me to dinner at the Suzhou University canteen on the evening of March 8. I accepted. No one else knew about this routine appointment. But not three hours after they extended this invitation to me, officials from Suzhou University looked them up and demanded to know how they had gotten in touch with Fang Lizhi, and why they had invited Fang Lizhi of all people to eat at the Suzhou University canteen, and so on. My two friends explained exactly what had happened. When they were finished, the officials let them off easy: they were to leave Suzhou University immediately, and were not allowed to come back to the university for dinner.

Word of this incident circulated around the astrophysics conference. Quite a few astronomers were intrigued by the puzzle of what methods the authorities had used to learn within three hours that Fang Lizhi was going to have dinner at the Suzhou University canteen. Some theoretical astrophysicists used their rigorous logic to rule out quite a few explanations, while some observational astronomers used their most hands-on methods to identify which of the canteen staff was a security bureau "plant."

Thanks to heaven, apart from this little interlude the five-day conference concluded successfully. At the end of the conference, Yang Yiquan very happily bid me farewell with words probably meant as an expression of thanks to his old friend: "No nuclear bomb exploded!"

But in fact, by then a nuclear bomb had in fact already exploded.

There is some validity in using "nuclear explosion" as a metaphor for the effect the spring of 1989 had on Chinese society.

A nuclear explosion requires several conditions: 1) there must be an adequate amount of nuclear fission material; 2) the fissionable material must be accumulated into a critical mass; 3) there must be a neutrons to trigger the explosion. (My first job in China in 1957 was to study these conditions.)

There is some validity in using “nuclear explosion” as a metaphor for the effect the spring of 1989 had on Chinese society.

First of all, corruption was growing steadily worse, political reform was stalled and the space for freedom of expression and of the press was being narrowed, leading an increasing number of students, intellectuals, workers, small businessmen, regular Party operatives and even some senior officials to feel angry, frustrated and discontent, building up an adequate amount of nuclear fission material. The fuel for a potential explosion was everywhere.

Secondly, there were many memorial days in 1989, including the seventieth anniversary of the May 4th Movement, the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China and the tenth anniversary of the Democracy Wall movement. Society’s diffuse discontents could easily be catalyzed by these memorial days, allowing the buildup of a critical mass of fissionable material.

And as for the “neutron” triggering the explosion, that could happen at any time. Small uprisings aroused by the authorities’ foolish actions might be suppressed in one place, only to pop up elsewhere, unceasingly. For example, the authorities’ incompetent handling of several open letters calling for a general amnesty was the kind of “neutron” that could trigger an explosion.

The death of Hu Yaobang on April 15 accelerated the fission process and far exceeded the required critical mass, and so the explosion occurred.

After the students began their petitions and protests, my daily routine changed to going to work at the Observatory in the morning, and in the afternoon receiving all kinds of visitors, including friends, students and journalists, and then in the evening writing articles. From the time the student movement began on April 16 until the beginning of martial law on May 20, in the space of a little more than a month, I finished an article that I had started at the beginning of the year and accepted 57 interviews from journalists.

Although in the interviews I always expressed my support for the students’ demands, I never participated in a protest, nor did I go to Tiananmen to see what was happening. The reason was that on the third day of the protests, April 20, the authorities began circulating rumors that the Beijing student movement was being orchestrated single-handedly by Fang Lizhi and his wife. And on this basis they awaited their chance to attack. At the same time, my colleagues at the Beijing Observatory began to take precautions against giving the authorities any such opportunity. Much gratitude is owed to the good people at the Observatory, who offered such effective protection to me and the students.

The morning of April 27 was when tensions began to mount. On that day the students organized a large protest march, and many graduate students from the Academy of Science took part. The purpose was to protest an editorial in the *People’s Daily* the day before, which had vilified the student movement as “turmoil” and as the creation of “a tiny clique of bad people.” Obviously the authorities wanted to use the technique of arresting “a tiny clique of bad people” to suppress the movement. This is a favorite method of the Chinese Communist authorities to suppress all expressions of discontent, and everyone knew what the next step would be. People who were participating in the protests reported that a rumor had indeed spread among the demonstrators that Fang Lizhi was among the ranks, running hither and yon and giving out orders. This was obviously a bad sign.

The scientists at the Observatory perceived early on what plans the creators of the bad sign had in mind, and preempted them. On the morning of April 27 the Observatory scheduled a seminar at which the French scientist Bonnet-Bidoud⁶ was to speak on submillisecond pulsars. Not only was that activity not canceled because of the protests, but the Observatory director had me preside over the meeting. Many colleagues who attended the meeting understood the reason for this arrangement, and upon arriving at the conference room (even before the rumors began circulating) they said to me, “Today we can act as witnesses to the fact that Fang Lizhi did not go out to lead the protest.” In this way the crisis was completely dissipated.

On April 28 I was urged for the first time to take flight. This warning came from some young colleagues who had learned through well-placed connections that the relevant officials were in the process of deciding how to deal with Fang Lizhi. By then my movements were monitored constantly. (One piece of evidence for this is that when the authorities later made a videotape designed to show that I had “created turmoil,” they were able to use actual footage showing me on my way to work at the Observatory). Several young colleagues had already worked out a plan for me to evade surveillance, and had arranged hiding places and methods of communicating with me. For example, one communication arrangement was to let the phone ring eight times, then hang up and call again.

I didn’t accept these arrangements, partly because I didn’t believe the authorities would be that bad, and also because I didn’t want to be parted from my Observatory colleagues in this way. But I accepted their warning to take the precautions of watching out for surveillance and avoiding walking alone at night.

On May 12 the students began their hunger strike, and the movement spread like wildfire. Gorbachev’s visit to Beijing was relegated to second headlines. The students and citizens of Beijing had caught the attention of the whole world. Suddenly people began to believe there was a future for change in China. In those few days, I really wanted to go to Tiananmen and see for myself what was happening. Some students and friends, especially foreign friends, urged me to hurry over to Tiananmen. “You should go,” they insisted. But my colleagues all around me strongly disagreed with my participating in any activity, because the situation was still far from clear, and the

crisis was by no means past. On several occasions, when some colleagues prepared to attend the protests, they would gather in front of my office and someone would say, "Lao Fang, you don't need to go, we'll represent you."

On May 15 I received a very earnest telephone call from Hong Kong University professor Stephen Cheung Ng-sheung, urging me to go to Tiananmen Square and advise the students to end their hunger strike. I also felt they should end their hunger strike, so on his urging I decided to go to Tiananmen to give it a try. But ultimately I restrained the impulse and didn't go. Professor Cheung probably knew that Professor Guan Weiyan⁷ and I had once had a similar success on the evening of December 23, 1986, advising students from the USTC to end their sit-in at the Hefei municipal government offices plaza. But that had already stretched my abilities to the limit. I definitely did not have enough influence to convince the students at Tiananmen to abandon their sit-in and hunger strike.

After martial law began in Beijing, many versions of a black list were circulated, supposedly of people the government was targeting for corrective action. I was included on every black list; only my position on the various lists was different. Friends at the Observatory advised me to use the excuse of attending a conference to leave Beijing.

In the last half of May, emotions were in flux, traffic was disrupted and many academic conferences were canceled. But the Observatory insisted on maintaining its original plans and on May 24–29 held a conference on high-energy stellar astronomy in Datong, Shanxi Province. Perhaps this is a tradition handed down from China's ancient astronomers, who in times of social upheaval stuck to their work because those were the times that society was most in need of a guiding star. Even though there is no need for guiding stars any more, the heavens will not cease their movement just because of social upheaval below.

On May 24 a colleague and I boarded a train and left Beijing. As we passed Changping, the entire station was filled with military trains, and our train was the only one crossing the vast expanse of track. It turned out that the soldiers on both sides of us were troops being brought into Beijing from the east.

In spite of the peril on all sides, the conference went off without a hitch. I presented a paper on "The High Energy Process of Supernova 1987A." On May 26 there was a conference break, during which arrangements had been made to take the attendees on a tour of the famous Xuan Kong Temple⁸. That structure was really unique. There were more than a dozen buildings of various sizes within the temple grounds, and none of them had been built on flat ground. All were suspended on the sheer surface of a huge cliff. The philosophy implied was that if one wished to attain the genuine fruits of asceticism, it was necessary to leave the world, leave secular life, and completely remove oneself from the turmoil of the red dust.

But it is impossible for anyone to leave worldly life. Suspension is only an illusion. Blood-soaked Beijing is the actual cliff.

Written in September 1990 at Clare Hall, Cambridge

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The translators thank Fang Lizhi and Perry Link for their helpful input and corrections.

1. Translator's note: A prominent dissident and physics and history professor known for his work in translating Einstein's collected work, Xu Liangying drafted another letter pleading for political tolerance in May 1995. His letter was signed by 45 prominent Chinese intellectuals and excerpts of the translation were published in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. He was promptly placed under house arrest with constant police surveillance outside his house. That same month Xu Liangying and Renmin University Professor Ding Zilin, founder of the Tiananmen Mothers, were jointly presented with the Heinz R. Pagels Human Rights of Scientists Award of the New York Academy of Science.
2. Translator's note: A section of Beijing often referred to as China's Silicon Valley, which includes Peking University and Tsinghua University.
3. Fang Lizhi's note: There's one example that suggests that in fact the police were following the original plan when they did this; in October 1987 an official of the Beijing Observatory was killed in a traffic accident, and at the time the traffic police called for the death to be classified as an accidental death rather than a traffic death. The reason was that they had already reached the number of traffic deaths allotted for that year, and if that number was exceeded, the police would not be able to receive the reward for meeting their annual objectives. In the end, the dead man's family did not agree and insisted that the death be classified as a traffic accident. The traffic police were still sensitive to this issue. In early 1988 the traffic police posted a notice on the street in front of the Beijing Observatory, stating that they were "striving dutifully to implement the traffic death toll objectives."
4. Translator's note: Located near Nanjing on the west peak of Zhongshan, the Purple Mountain (*Zijinshan*) Observatory was constructed in 1934 as China's first modern observatory.
5. Fang Lizhi, *Tianti Wulixue Qianyan Niao Kan*, Publishing House of Scientific Documentation (1989).
6. Translator's note: Jean-Mark Bonnet Bidaud is a French astronomer and expert on pulsars.
7. Translator's note: After Fang Lizhi became Vice-President of the University of Science and Technology (Keda) in Hefei City, Anhui Province in 1984, he and recently-appointed President Guan Weiyan instituted a plan for academic reforms that allowed for a more democratic redistribution of power at the university. Fang and Guan were removed from their posts in January 1987. Fang was reassigned to the Beijing Observatory while Guan, a physicist, was sent to the Institute of Physics in the Academy of Sciences. Guan left China in 1987 to do research in Europe, and then in the U.S. in 1989. He was invited to Taiwan's National Tsing Hua University in 1991, where he continued his research in superconductivity. He died in 2003.
8. Translator's note: literally, "temple suspended in air."