

Computer Engineer Turns Entrepreneur-in-Exile

Wan Runnan built a multimillion-dollar computer company from scratch in China, only to abandon it in the name of democracy

IN THE WAKE of the crackdown against the pro-democracy movement, China lost one of its brightest stars among economic reformers: computer engineer Wan Runnan.

Wan, 42, was just what the China government has been hoping for as it loosened its economic policies to encourage individual initiative. Five years ago, Wan and several other scientists and engineers quit their jobs at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' computer center in Beijing, and, with a loan of less than \$5400 from a local collective, founded a private electronics firm, Stone Group, in a former vegetable shop in the city's northwest sector. Last year, with a staff of 600 and 400 retail stores across China,

Stone racked up sales of 1 billion yuan or about \$270 million, making it China's main manufacturer of computers and a host of peripherals, including a hot-selling printer that writes both Chinese characters and the English alphabet and is IBM-compatible.

Now Wan has lost his company, having chosen to become an entrepreneur-in-exile. And he's trying to keep the pro-democracy movement alive by forming an expatriate political group to promote the democracy movement in China. Last week, he came to Washington, D.C., with other Chinese escapees to drum up support for their cause.

Wan credits Stone's success to the economic reforms allowed by Deng. But what

China's senior leader Deng Xiaoping seems not to have anticipated is that his economic reforms would whet Wan's taste—like that of other Chinese intellectuals—for political reform. As the pro-democracy demonstrations swelled at Tiananmen Square this spring, Wan and the Stone Group saw a rare opportunity to back political reform with their new wealth. They provided important financial support to the students and supplied them with loudspeakers and power generators to keep lights blazing on the square at night.

Then, in late May, as the political situation was becoming increasingly volatile, a Stone Group subsidiary made a remarkable move. Presumably under Wan's direction, it circulated a petition among members of the National People's Congress Standing Committee appealing for an emergency meeting to discuss ways to settle the crisis and collected more than three dozen signatures. The action was seen as a direct challenge to Deng's authority.

The petition precipitated a personal crisis for Wan. On 26 May, he was scheduled to speak at a seminar in Hong Kong. A few days before, the computer engineer called the meeting organizers and said he was sending a representative instead. Then Wan disappeared, turning up in Paris in mid-July, where he was seen on television, standing behind escaped student leader Wuer Kaixi. A colleague told *Science* that Wan slipped out of China on the visa originally intended for his trip to the Hong Kong meeting.

Free to speak his mind, Wan assails Deng for not bending to the calls for political reform, which he said were a "natural result" of economic reform. And he goes further, saying that "after the June 4th massacre, Deng became a criminal."

"The political system in China has to be changed," Wan says. "People like me tried to work within the system [for political reform] but the effort failed. We have to fight for freedom in China."

Wan predicts that China's economy, already suffering from 30% inflation in the past year, will worsen. But this situation is an opportunity "to provide help to the democratic movement," he believes. That's where his group of expatriates comes in. Wan, Yan Jiaqi, former head of the Institute for Political Science in Beijing and close adviser to Zhao, and student leaders have called their organization the United Democratic Front to rebuild from abroad the democracy movement in China.

As for the fate of Stone, which accounts for 40% of computer sales in China, Wan says that after the events on 4 June, "economic reform is on hold, and that's the fate of Stone."

■ MARJORIE SUN

Biologist Monitors Human Rights



Fu Xin-yuan

Fu Xin-yuan was the son of an intellectual during the Cultural Revolution in China, and, for that sin, he was separated from his family and sent to the countryside to work in the fields and be reeducated. There, as a teen-ager, seeing the poverty and ignorance of peasants, Fu resolved that he had to help transform Chinese society. He would do it by learning science.

Now Fu, 34, who used to read books by candlelight in the countryside and learned English by listening to Voice of America broadcasts, is a molecular biologist and a visiting

scholar at Rockefeller University. But just becoming a scientist, he says, isn't enough to change China, so he's taking additional steps.

Along with a handful of other Chinese scholars in the United States, Fu this spring formed a new organization called Human Rights in China. It monitors abuses of civil liberties in China and promotes activism to draw attention to violations.

Fu says the Western world has held "an illusion" that there have been few human rights abuses in China. "We want the United States to deal with human rights in China like it has with the Soviet Union," he said. "China has been relatively free of criticism." When Westerners do business with China, "they should make sure they raise human rights violations. Otherwise Deng [Xiaoping] will think the world doesn't care," Fu said.

Fu concedes that it is difficult to verify violations and quantify the number of people arrested. His organization tries to track down rumors of arrests and other violations through its own informal network of Chinese students and scholars in the United States and China, Amnesty International, and others.

The group absorbs a lot of energy and time, but Fu says he's trying to get back to his interferon research. "First I am a scientist." He still sees himself as a Chinese citizen. He wants to go back to China—but not right now. Why would he want to return? "If no one goes back, how can science in China progress? I don't work for the government. I work for the people."

■ M.S.