

Xu Zhiyong

A Beautiful China

Eighteen

For Freedom, Justice, and Love — Court Statement

Shortly after Xi Jinping assumed power as the General Secretary of the Communist Party in November 2012 and the Chairman of the state in March 2013, he began the first wave of large-scale crackdowns on civil society, arresting over twenty New Citizens Movement activists. Xu Zhiyong was among them. Xu was tried in Beijing on January 22, 2014. Below is his court statement, which he was legally entitled to deliver in the courtroom but interrupted by the judge as soon as he started. It was made public by his defense lawyers after the trial and circulated widely at the time. He was sentenced to four years in prison for “disturbing public order.”

— The Editors

The New Citizens Movement

You have accused me of disturbing public order through my advocacy. I advocated for educational equality, specifically, for allowing migrant children to take the college entrance exam locally. And I called for the public disclosure of officials' assets.

At first glance, this may seem to concern the boundaries between citizens' freedom of speech and the maintenance of public order. But the truth of the matter is about whether or not you genuinely uphold citizens' constitutional rights.

Still deeper, the issue lies within your hearts — a profound fear: fear of open trials, fear of citizens freely attending court sessions, fear of my name echoing across the internet, and fear of the free society that inevitably approaches.

You are attempting to crush the New Citizens Movement and obstruct China's peaceful path toward democratic constitutionalism. While the trial itself has not explicitly referenced the New Citizens Movement, the case materials are rife with references to it. I believe there's no need to shy away from this topic. Let's address it openly, because it holds great significance for the progress of Chinese society.

The New Citizens Movement calls on every Chinese person to stand tall and fully embrace what it means to be a citizen.

Take your identity as a citizen seriously. We are citizens, the true masters of the state

— not subjects, not obedient followers, not faceless masses, nor violent mobs.

Take your rights as a citizen seriously. The sacred rights enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China — such as the right to vote, freedom of speech, and freedom of belief — must not remain mere words on paper forever.

Take your responsibilities as a citizen seriously. China belongs to each and every one of us. The foundation of a moral and just society lies beneath our feet, and it is our duty to stand firm in defending it.

The New Citizens Movement promotes a civic spirit founded on freedom, justice, and love. Personal freedom — the pursuit of an authentic, unrestrained and joyful self — is the ultimate purpose of both the state and society. Justice defines the boundaries of personal freedom; it represents fairness, righteousness and the enduring principle of moral conscience. Love embodies kindness, tolerance, compassion, and selflessness — it is the most beautiful human emotion and the source of true happiness. Freedom, justice, and love are our core values and the guiding principles behind our actions.

The New Citizens Movement calls on every citizen to begin with themselves and with their communities, with small actions, and through working to change specific public policies and institutions. Through rational and constructive actions, we can advance the country's progress toward democracy and the rule of law.

Chinese citizens who seek democracy, the rule of law, fairness, and justice must unite under the shared identity of citizenship, forming a community grounded in the principles of freedom and democracy. This community will grow into a healthy and rational force within civil society.

The citizens movement is united by a common civic identity, a belief in democratic constitutionalism, and a dedication to the ideals of freedom, justice, and love. It is not an authoritarian organization — there are no leaders, no hierarchy, no commands or obedience, no discipline, nor punishment. It is a completely voluntary union of free citizens.

Across different regions, these citizen groups have grown autonomously and spontaneously through efforts to push for specific institutional reforms. As watchdogs of public power, advocates for political reform, and builders of democracy and the rule of law, these groups mature through their actions, driving social progress.

Actions such as advocating for equal educational rights for migrant workers' children to take the college entrance exam locally, and calling for transparency through public disclosure of officials' assets, exemplify this philosophy of civic engagement.

Educational Equality

Our campaign to promote educational equality for the children of migrant workers began at the end of 2009. It lasted three years. The goal was to allow these children to take the college entrance exam where they live with their parents.

Before this, Gongmeng (公盟) had received numerous pleas for help from parents,

which brought this serious social issue to our attention. Over 200 million internal migrants work and live in cities across China, yet despite being taxpayers, they are denied the full rights of urban residents. One of the most critical issues is that their children are not permitted to attend school or sit the college entrance exam in the cities where their parents reside. Instead, these children must return to their distant and unfamiliar hometowns to continue their education, resulting in the creation of tens of millions of "left-behind children" nationwide.

Many people express concern over the plight of these left-behind children, yet few consider that the best way to help them is by dismantling the barriers imposed by the household registration system. This would allow them to live and study alongside their parents, reuniting families.

Our campaign unfolded in three phases. The first phase, which took place from early 2010 to June of that year, involved petitioning the Beijing Municipal Education Commission and the Haidian District Education Commission. Through negotiations, we successfully promoted equal access to middle school for primary school students, regardless of their household registration status.

The second phase, from July 2010 to August 2012, involved monthly petitions to the Ministry of Education, where we advocated for policies allowing migrant children to take the *gaokao* (college entrance exam) locally, in the cities where their families live.

The third phase, from September 2012 until the end of the year, focused on urging the Beijing Municipal Education Commission to implement the Ministry of Education's newly issued policies.

We gathered signatures, expanded the team of parent volunteers, and on the last Thursday of each month, we petitioned the Ministry of Education, submitted proposals, and organized expert seminars to explore the feasibility of allowing migrant children to take the *gaokao* locally. We reached out to thousands of National People's Congress (NPC) delegates through letters, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings, imploring them to propose motions during the annual Two Sessions.

During the 2011 Two Sessions, the Minister of Education revealed in an interview that a plan for local *gaokao* access for migrant children was being drafted. By the 2012 Two Sessions, the Minister publicly committed to introducing the policy within the first half of the year and instructed local governments to issue specific implementation guidelines by the year's end.

On June 28th, 2012, just like so many times before, the parent volunteers gathered for their routine petition day, and once again, they received no response from the education department. On-site, the group agreed that if the Ministry of Education failed to issue the promised policy by the end of the month, they would return the following Thursday. This is how the July 5th petition came about.

In August 2012, the Ministry of Education finally announced the policy allowing migrant children to take the *gaokao* locally, and instructed all regions to release detailed implementation plans by the year's end. By the close of 2012, 29 provinces and municipalities across the country had introduced plans allowing migrant children to sit for the *gaokao* where their families lived.

However, Beijing became the exception. Smiling bitterly, a parent remarked, “We have fought for three years and freed all of China, yet we are the ones left behind.”

I knew that there were tears behind that smile. Their children will soon be separated from them, sent to unfamiliar places to study, and perhaps their fates will be impacted forever. The very advocates of this policy — non-Beijing parents living in Beijing — were unable to win the same opportunities for their own children.

I felt deeply sorry for everyone involved, and by that time, many people had already lost hope. I had no choice but to stand at the entrances to subway stations and hand out flyers, urging people to take a day off on February 28th, and gather in front of the Beijing Municipal Education Commission to make one final effort. This is how the February 28th petition came about.

On both July 5th and February 28th, we went to the education department, a government institution — not a public space in the legal sense. The Criminal Law clearly defines public spaces as areas excluding state institutions, social organizations, and public roads. Therefore, our actions did not legally constitute a disruption of public order.

For three years, we conducted ourselves peacefully and rationally. On July 5th, some parents were emotional, but that was understandable: the Ministry of Education had broken its public promises and offered no explanation. Even then, the parents merely chanted a few slogans and requested to speak with the Minister of Education, entirely reasonable actions. They carried with them a petition signed by 100,000 people, representing 200 million urban migrants.

And what was the response? Just look at the photos: a parent known online as "Dance" was dragged away by the police by her hair. Was there truly no other way to remove her? Had she engaged in any violent or extremist behavior?

Throughout the past three years, had she ever engaged in any extremist behavior? No, not once.

Every time I recall this moment, it fills me with deep sorrow. For three years, our goal was so simple, our actions so peaceful, yet we were met with such malicious treatment. The police had pre-prepared lists of people whom they were to target and beat.

But still, I kept urging everyone, over and over: we must remain rational, we must stay calm. Educational equality — allowing migrant children to take the *gaokao* locally — embodies the very principles of the citizens movement. We begin by changing specific public policies, advocating for freedom of movement, for justice, and for love. We cannot behave like those who oppress us. This society needs new hope, and we cannot afford to become like them.

In 1958, China established the household registration (*hukou*) system, creating a divide between urban and rural areas. In 1961, the Custody and Repatriation system was introduced. From that point on, any rural person seeking work and a better life in the city could be arrested and sent back to their hometown at any time. In 2002, Beijing alone saw 220,000 such arrests and repatriations.

In 2003, the Custody and Repatriation system was abolished. But the path to integrating new migrants into cities remains long and difficult. In 2006, during our research in Beijing, we identified 19 discriminatory policies targeting non-local permanent populations. The most inhumane among them was the denial of education to children living with their parents.

We spent three full years fighting for the right of migrant children to take the *gaokao* locally.

During those three years, I witnessed volunteers for educational equality braving freezing winters and scorching summers to collect signatures at subway stations, on street corners, and outside shopping centers, until the number of supporters with contact details reached over 100,000.

I witnessed hundreds of parents gather in the courtyard of the Ministry of Education's petition office, reciting in unison their *Educational Equality Declaration*.

During the 2012 Qingming (Tomb Sweeping) Festival, I witnessed hundreds of parents and children planting trees in Qinglong Lake Park. Everyone wore hats emblazoned with the same logo — 'In Beijing, Love Beijing.'

I witnessed a little girl break down in tears during the recording of *Tiger Talk* on Phoenix TV. She cried because she didn't want to leave her parents, who worked in Beijing, and go back to her distant and unfamiliar registered hometown for school.

Zhang Xudong was one of the top ten students of his class at Guozijian Middle School located in a *hutong* outside Di'anmen. Zhang was forced to leave Beijing after middle school and go to a completely unfamiliar school in Zhangjiakou because he did not have a Beijing household registration. A year later, due to the challenges of adjusting to a new environment, language, and curriculum, he dropped out. This once cheerful, talkative boy became silent and withdrawn.

His parents had worked in Beijing for nearly thirty years, yet they were still outsiders, the underclass of this city.

When I think of the countless children whose lives have been irrevocably changed by this cruel household registration system, when I think of the generations of Chinese people harmed by this system, and the untold number of people who died on the road of repatriation, I feel immense pride standing here in the defendant's seat today. I am not only entirely without regret — I am proud. I stand here to fight for the elimination of China's identity-based segregation system, and for the right of tens of millions of left-behind children to attend school by their parents' side.

The Call for the Public Disclosure of Officials' Assets

Our call for the public disclosure of officials' assets is part of our effort to promote anti-corruption reforms in the country.

Over 137 countries and regions around the world have already implemented systems requiring officials to disclose their assets. So why can't China do the same? What are these so-called "servants of the people" afraid of? Greed and ill-gotten wealth bring

not only a life of luxury, but also a deep-seated fear and anxiety, as well as growing anger and resentment of the people.

We gathered signatures online, distributed pamphlets, and held banners in the streets, calling for the public disclosure of officials' assets. In doing so, we were also exercising our constitutional right to freedom of speech. Our actions did not infringe upon anyone's legitimate rights, nor did they pose any harm to society. Even if some words spoken at Xidan [*a commercial area west of Tiananmen Square where four New Citizens Movement activists unfurled banners and made speeches on March 31, 2013*] were impassioned, expressing opinions about public policy remained well within the constitutional and legal boundaries of freedom of speech.

In a modern, civilized society, it is entirely normal for citizens to express political opinions in public spaces through actions such as holding banners or giving speeches. Law enforcement agencies may supervise these activities and prevent potential issues, but they should not abuse their power or interfere unjustly.

In fact, when we displayed banners at Tsinghua University's west gate, Zhongguancun Square, and other locations, no police were present. There was no disruption of public order, and no infringement of anyone's rights. After displaying the banners, we simply left. This aligns with our "flash mob" approach.

We deliberately chose small-scale flash mob actions instead of organizing large gatherings. We were mindful of China's national context and society's capacity to tolerate such expressions.

Naturally, we hope that all the sacred rights guaranteed by the constitution will one day become a reality. But we also recognize that reform requires stability, and social progress needs to be gradual. As responsible citizens, we are taking small steps to exercise our constitutional rights and to push the country forward on its path toward democracy and the rule of law.

A Decade of Building

It's been ten years. For freedom, justice, and love, and for the vision of a better China, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to peaceful reform, working to drive national progress.

We used public incidents as catalysts to bring about change with regard to specific policies. In 2003, Sun Zhigang's tragic death led to the abolition of the Custody and Repatriation system. As legal professionals, we also did our part challenging the constitutionality of that system as citizens.

Over the past decade, we have continued to fight for equal rights for new urban migrants, culminating in the 2012 policy which allowed migrant children to take the *gaokao* locally [*nationwide except in Beijing*].

We have also provided legal aid to victims of severe injustices, including those affected by the melamine-contaminated milk scandal and the victims of the high-speed train accident in Wenzhou in 2011.

After the 2008 Sanlu milk powder scandal erupted, we brought together a team of lawyers to provide legal counsel to affected families. Drawing on media reports, we estimated the number of victims and united the victims to push for a fair and government-led compensation scheme. However, the compensation ultimately fell far short of covering the damage many children had suffered. Some families spent nearly 100,000 yuan on surgeries, while the compensation was only 30,000 yuan.

Afterward, we continued our fight for justice for over 400 children who had entrusted us with their cases, filing lawsuits with the Supreme Court, over 100 local courts, and even courts in Hong Kong.

In July 2009, while I was imprisoned on the pretext of tax evasion by the Gongmeng (Open Constitution Initiative), and as supporters from all walks of life were raising funds to pay our fines, our volunteers in the south were distributing 1 million yuan in compensation to the victims. I am forever proud of that moment. Even in the face of our own hardships, we never wavered in our commitment to those in need.

During many winters, we delivered cotton clothes, blankets, and steamed buns to petitioners sleeping on the streets of Beijing, hoping to prevent them from quietly freezing or starving to death in the midst of this bustling metropolis.

Petitioning is a uniquely Chinese form of rights defense. China is a society of personal connections which breed privilege, corruption, and injustice. Though still a small minority, tens of thousands of stubborn, powerless individuals dared to stand up for their rights and dignity, gathering in the capital to petition for justice.

In Beijing, they were evicted, illegally detained, and beaten. We identified the existence of 42 illegal detention centers, or "black jails," where petitioners were unlawfully held in Beijing.

We went to these places to bear witness. Armed with the law, we reported the crimes that were being committed, only to be insulted and beaten by the guards. Time and again, I felt proud to share even a small part of their suffering.

Ten years have passed. Because we have stood with the powerless, we have witnessed far too much injustice and unfairness, too much suffering and misfortune. Yet, we continue with hopeful hearts, working rationally and constructively to advance the nation.

We advocated for a constitutional review of the Custody and Repatriation system; we drafted new management regulations for homeless and vagrant individuals. In our fight for educational equality, the local *gaokao* policy we proposed for migrant children was adopted by most provinces and cities. As part of our call for transparency, we were discussing the drafting of a *Sunshine Law* before the March arrests in 2013, which would require officials to publicly disclose their assets.

Raising problems means finding solutions. Our opposition is for the sake of building something better. We are citizens of a new era, responsible citizens of this nation. We love China.

Our Political Objectives

You view the existence and growth of civic groups as heresy, and this fills you with fear.

You accuse us of having political objectives. Yes, of course, we have political objectives. Our goals are clear: to build a beautiful China based on democracy, the rule of law, freedom, justice, and love.

What we seek is not the ruthless politics of power struggles, where might makes right. We pursue noble politics that is dedicated to the welfare of the people, where all citizens share the responsibility of governing the nation.

Our mission is not to acquire power, but to restrain it. We aim to establish a strong and enduring system of democracy and the rule of law to secure fairness, justice, freedom, and happiness for future generations of the Chinese people. Our goal is to lay the foundation for a noble tradition of political civilization.

True democracy and the rule of law are essential to beautiful politics.

True democracy and the rule of law mean that governments and parliaments at every level are elected by the people, with power coming from the ballot box, not the barrel of a gun.

True democracy and the rule of law mean that politics operates within a legal framework, where political parties compete fairly. Only those who win in free and fair elections have the right to govern.

True democracy and the rule of law mean that state power is divided scientifically, with checks and balances in place. Judicial independence is guaranteed, and judges are guided by the law and their conscience.

True democracy and the rule of law mean that the military and police serve the public and must never be reduced to the private assets of any political party or interest group.

True democracy and the rule of law mean that the media serve the public interest and must not be monopolized by any political party or interest group as its mouthpiece.

True democracy and the rule of law demand that the sacred rights enshrined in the constitution — such as the right to vote, freedom of speech, and freedom of belief — are fully realized. The promise that the people are the true masters of the country must never be a hollow one.

The values and principles of modern democracy are deeply rooted in universal human nature. They are neither Eastern nor Western, nor exclusive to socialism or capitalism — they belong to all of humanity. In every human society, without exception, these values hold true.

Democracy is a form of knowledge that addresses the challenges faced by humanity. Our ancestors did not discover this knowledge, and we should be humble enough to learn from others.

For over thirty years, China has embraced an economy allowing market competition, leading to economic prosperity. In the same way, we must now introduce free competition in the political arena through democratic constitutionalism to address the deepening social injustices we face today.

In China today, social inequality is worsening, and the unjust distribution of political power is the greatest of these injustices. It is also the root cause of all other forms of inequality.

The source of many of China's major social problems lies in the fact that a small, privileged interest group has monopolized all political power and controls the nation's economic lifeblood. China's most fundamental issue is the need for democratic constitutionalism.

Year after year, anti-corruption campaigns are launched, yet after more than sixty years, corruption has only worsened. Without democratic elections, press freedom, and an independent judiciary, absolute power can never produce a clean and transparent government.

Year after year, the government promises to improve people's livelihoods, yet hundreds of millions of people still live below the internationally recognized poverty line. In remote areas, even the 100-yuan monthly welfare payments are often siphoned off by corrupt officials.

The wealth gap between the elites and ordinary citizens continues to grow. The public's resentment towards the rich and powerful stems from their anger at a system built on monopolized privileges.

Even in basic education, countless families are forced to exhaust themselves, seeking connections, paying bribes, and worrying just to secure a place for their children in school. Some even have to resort to bribery to get their children into kindergarten. How has society decayed to such a state?

Humans are political beings. We need more than just food and clothing; we need freedom, justice, and the right to participate in the governance of our country.

You claim that the National People's Congress is China's highest organ of state power, yet you also insist that this highest organ must obey the leadership of the Party. When the country's fundamental political system is a blatant lie, how can a society build trust?

You speak of judicial fairness and open trials, yet individuals with seemingly no connection to the trial whatsoever are strategically placed to occupy the courtroom's public seats. When even the courts resort to such underhanded tactics, where can the people find a basic standard of justice?

As a result, interactions between people are increasingly cold and distant. Even the simple question of whether to help an elderly person who has fallen down has become a long-standing and controversial issue. Scandals such as the toxic milk powder and illegal brick kilns continue to emerge. "It is what it is" becomes the excuse for endless wrongdoings.

The greatest problem facing Chinese society today is falsehood. And the biggest falsehood lies at the very core of the political system and its ideology. Can anyone truly explain what socialism is? Is the National People's Congress genuinely the highest organ of state power?

There are no limits to political deceit, and 1.3 billion citizens are paying the price. Suspicion, disappointment, confusion, anger, helplessness, and frustration have become the daily reality for many people.

Indeed, politics affects each of us intimately. We cannot detach ourselves from it. The only path forward is to strive for its change.

Power must be confined within the constraints of a system. We must move beyond autocratic rule by a family or a single Party.

The Path for China

I genuinely hope that the current leadership will align with the tides of human civilization and proactively push for political reform. I hope they will build a system of democratic constitutionalism and, through peaceful change, achieve the long-standing dream of the people being the true masters of the country.

More than a century ago, China missed the opportunity to transition toward democratic constitutionalism through peaceful reform.

Throughout the 20th century, the Chinese people endured revolution, turmoil, and immense suffering. The brief hope for a market economy and democratic constitutionalism during the Republican era flickered for a moment, only to be extinguished by the resurgence of totalitarian politics, which reached its zenith during the Cultural Revolution.

After the Cultural Revolution, China's economic reform followed a model of incremental reform. Without dismantling the old system, social controls were loosened, and as a result the forces emerging from the market began to influence and push back against the old system, driving further reform.

In the same way, China's political reform could adopt a similar approach, relaxing social controls without undermining the old system, allowing democratic forces outside the system to grow in a healthy and constructive way. This is the meaningful path forward for China.

We have been acting responsibly for the sake of the country as we try to build a civic community by taking rational, measured steps.

There is no need for you to fear the New Citizens Movement. We are citizens of a new era. Ideologically, we have completely abandoned the authoritarian mindset of enemies, conquest, overthrow, and destruction. We are dedicated to the values of freedom, justice, and love. In terms of actions, we have fully rejected conspiracies, violence, and other barbaric methods. We seek to promote social progress through peaceful reform, growing healthily and openly in broad daylight.

The establishment of constitutional democracy is the inevitable path for China's future political civilization. Our mission is to join forces with all forward-looking individuals in China to drive the transformation towards a truly civilized political system.

The New Citizens Movement is both a political reform movement aimed at advancing democracy and the rule of law, and a cultural movement dedicated to building a political tradition and a set of compatible cultural values.

For constitutional democracy to function effectively, it needs a fertile soil of political civilization, and our collective expectation and belief are the soil. The pursuit of a fair and just political system must become a shared national belief, while the unchecked, barbaric politics of the past must in our hearts be forever relegated to the past.

This requires a group of courageous, exemplary citizens willing to shoulder responsibility, make personal sacrifices, and serve as models of civic virtue. It is also the duty of every Chinese citizen.

Our Responsibility

This is my responsibility.

Being born on this land, my love for this country needs no reason. To love China is to strive to make her better.

I have chosen to be a peaceful reformist, continuing the unfinished mission of those who came before me over the last century. I advocate for absolute nonviolence, for freedom, justice, and love, and for peaceful reform leading to democratic constitutionalism.

I'm well placed to live a privileged life within the current system, but any form of privilege would bring me shame. Instead, I choose to stand with the powerless and the voiceless. I choose to feel the bitter cold of Beijing's winter streets and underpasses, and to endure the brutal violence of the black jails alongside them.

Heaven has created poverty and wealth, and differences in status, not to make us despise or hate one another, but to bring us closer through love. I am honored to have the opportunity of walking the arduous road of petitioning for justice alongside them.

I made the choice to bear this responsibility. When my daughter had just been born and my family needed me most, I longed to stay with my wife and baby. Yet, for many years, in the face of the suffering of the innocent and the weak, I have been unable to control my sorrow or remain silent.

I have come to believe that both judgment and purgatory are part of destiny. For freedom, justice, and love, for the well-being of all people, and for the glory of God, I am willing to endure it all.

This is the responsibility of our civic community.

In a society where most people bow in submission, someone must stand up first.

Someone must face the risks and bear the costs for the sake of progress. We are the Chinese who have taken that first stand. We care deeply about our country's future and destiny, about democracy and the rule of law, about fairness and justice, and about the dignity and happiness of the vulnerable. We are guided by purity and kindness, rejecting deceit and intrigue, and yearning for a life that is free, simple, and joyful.

We dedicate ourselves to serving society, helping those in need, and advancing social progress. We courageously assume responsibility, forsaking privileges, many worldly benefits, and even our freedom, all in pursuit of our ideals.

We strive to leave behind selfishness and concerns over personal gains and losses, to respect the rights and boundaries of others, and to be humble before our fellow human beings.

Your Responsibility

This is also your responsibility as judges and prosecutors.

It is your duty to be loyal to the law and to your conscience, and to uphold the fundamental principles of justice. Do not allow yourselves to become mere cogs in the bureaucratic machine, and do not trample on the dignity of the rule of law. Do not justify your actions by claiming you are serving the greater good. China's greatest good is not the orders of those in power, but the integrity of the rule of law.

Do not claim that you are simply following the logic of the law in convicting me. Do not forget the sacred rights enshrined in the Constitution. Do not excuse your actions by saying this is just your job and you are innocent. Every person is accountable for their actions and must at all times remain true to their conscience.

In a country where the rule of man has prevailed for thousands of years, Chinese legal professionals carry a unique burden. Whether as a defense lawyer, a juror, or a professor of constitutional law, I have always sought to uphold the bottom line of conscience and justice. I hope you will do the same.

I have always hoped for a movement of conscience awakening within China's judiciary. I hope that one day, as judges, you will be held in the same high regard as your peers in other countries. I hope that this awakening of conscience begins with you.

To those watching this trial from behind the scenes, and to those giving instructions or awaiting reports about this trial, this is your responsibility too.

Do not cling to the old system simply because you benefit from it. In an unjust system, no one is truly safe. You are filled with too much fear, believing that politics will always be a brutal struggle marked by bloodshed and violence. But I must tell you, times have changed. In this new era of civilization, the greatest force in human society is not violence but love.

Do not fear democracy, do not fear the loss of privilege, do not fear fair competition, and do not fear the free society that is on the horizon.

Perhaps you think my ideals are too far-fetched, too impractical, but I believe in the power of faith. I believe in the deep well of truth, goodness, and beauty within the human soul. I believe in the immense, unstoppable tide of progress in human civilization.

Our Collective Responsibility

This is the shared responsibility of 1.3 billion Chinese citizens.

Dynasties and political parties may come and go like fleeting clouds in the sky, but China will endure. As citizens of this nation, we all share the responsibility to build a beautiful future for China.

China will undoubtedly become one of the greatest countries in the world, with the most advanced technology, the most prosperous economy, the strongest global force for defending fairness and justice, and the most vibrant culture, leading the advancement of human civilization.

But this cannot be the China of authoritarianism. It must be a China where constitutional civilization has been realized. It must be a democratic China, a China governed by the rule of law, a free China.

Let us all consider what we can contribute to making this vision of our country's future a reality.

This country lacks freedom, and it is up to each one of us to fight for it. This society is short on justice, and it is up to each one of us to defend it. This society is devoid of love, and it is up to each one of us to ignite it with sincerity.

Let us all take our identity as citizens seriously, take our rights as citizens seriously, take our responsibilities as citizens seriously, and take the dream of a civic society seriously.

Let us all uphold the baseline of conscience and justice. Never should we commit wrongs because of orders from above, nor should we pass on harm because someone pushes us from behind.

The bottom line is beneath your feet, beneath each of our feet.

Let us together awaken the dormant conscience with love, tear down the barriers between our hearts with love, and use love to build a noble political civilization for the Chinese nation.

Calmly Accepting Honor

In this absurd, post-totalitarian society, my advocacy for educational equality, calling for officials to disclose their assets, and encouraging citizens to stand up with dignity have been branded as my three major crimes.

We would be clearly innocent if the authorities sincerely upheld the constitutional

rights of citizens. We had no intention of disrupting public order; we sought only to advance democracy and the rule of law in our country.

Our actions did not disrupt public order. We were simply exercising our constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of speech.

We did not disrupt public order, and no one's legitimate rights were violated because of our actions.

I am fully aware that social progress always requires sacrifice. I am willing to bear any cost for my belief in freedom, justice, and love, and for the bright future of China. If you choose to persecute the conscience of a nation, I will calmly accept my fate and wear this honor with pride.

But do not believe that by imprisoning me, you can silence the New Citizens Movement.

The unstoppable tide of modern civilization will inevitably inspire more and more Chinese people to take their citizenship, their rights and responsibilities that come with it, seriously.

One day, my 1.3 billion Chinese compatriots will rise from submissive subjects to become dignified citizens. That day will come. It will be a nation of political civilization, a society built on freedom, justice, and love. And those redeemed will not only be the powerless and oppressed, but also you — those in high positions of power, whose hearts are clouded by fear and darkness.

I am a Citizen

Today, China still proudly flies the banner of reform. I sincerely hope that reform will proceed successfully and achieve the dream of a prosperous and just China. But reform must follow a clear and correct direction.

Continuing to 'cross the river by feeling the stones' [*as Deng Xiaoping prescribed*] is irresponsible. Treating symptoms without addressing their root cause is irresponsible. Engaging in top-down system design without fundamental political reforms is equally irresponsible.

Where is China heading? A century later, this remains the fundamental question confronting our nation.

With entrenched interest groups, a slowing economy, and the eruption of long-accumulated social injustices, China once again stands at a historical crossroads.

If reform aligns with the tide of history and pursues democratic constitutionalism, it will succeed. But if it defies the tide of history to preserve one-party rule, it is bound to fail.

Without a clear direction toward democratic constitutionalism, even the most comprehensive reforms risk reverting to the old patterns of the late Qing Dynasty's "Chinese essence with Western application" approach. In many ways, we are reliving

the tragedy of the late Qing reformists from over a century ago. I remain deeply worried about the future of the Chinese nation.

When the hope of reform is extinguished, the people will rise up in revolution. The elites are already moving their wealth and families abroad; they are indifferent to the suffering of the weak and to China's future.

But we care.

Peaceful reform towards democratic constitutionalism is the only path to secure a prosperous future for the Chinese nation. A century ago, we missed this opportunity; today, we cannot afford to make the same mistake. It is the Chinese people who must determine the future direction of our country.

My fellow citizens, no matter what may happen in China, I implore you to hold steadfastly to the ideals of freedom, justice, and love.

Hold firm to the belief in freedom. Live in truth and pursue the universal freedoms for which generations of patriots have fought and bled over the past century.

Hold firm to the belief in justice. Always carry a heart for justice and never resort to immoral means to achieve your aims. Strive for a society where democracy and the rule of law are fully realized, where everyone fulfills their duties, contributes their talents, and finds their rightful place. A society where the strong are held in check, the weak are protected, and justice is built on the foundation of moral conscience.

Hold firm to the belief in love. There are too many dark and bitter souls in this nation that are in need of redemption. There is too much suspicion, fear, and hostility among people. These demons buried deep within our souls must be cast out — not through hatred, but through redemption. We are the redeemers.

Freedom, justice, and love are the New Citizens' spirit. They will, someday, undoubtedly become the core values of the Chinese nation. But this will require the struggle, sacrifice, and responsibility of our generation.

Building a beautiful China, one that is democratic, governed by the rule of law, free, just, and filled with love. This is our unwavering belief. If we believe in love; in the power of light and hope, and in humanity's deep longing for truth, goodness, and beauty, we can turn this belief into a reality.

Citizens, let us begin now. No matter where you are, no matter what your profession is, whether you are rich or poor, let us declare with conviction and pride, in our hearts, in our daily lives, online, and across every inch of this land, the identity that is rightfully ours: I am a citizen. We are citizens.

Citizen Xu Zhiyong
January 22, 2014

