

THE END OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

During Chiva's Cultural Revolution, Nien Cheng, wife of a former Chinese diplomat, spent seven years in prison and then five years under surveillance, allegedly for being "a spy of the imperialists." Here is an excerpt from her account of the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s.

After supper, I heard Mrs. Zhu calling me in the garden. When I went to the balcony, she told me that the Residents' Committee had called a meeting; we were to go over immediately. I hastily picked up my stool and joined her to walk across the street. . . .

After everybody had arrived, a middle-aged official of the District Party Committee got up and read a resolution passed by the Politburo. The gist of it was that "revolutionary action" had been taken on October 6 by the 8341 Regiment stationed at Zhongnanhai . . . to arrest Jiang Qing and her three close associates, known collectively as "the Gang of Four." . . . The arrest followed a Politburo meeting at which the decision had been approved unanimously, in order to preserve Party unity and prevent the disruption of the work of building socialism. . . .

The resolution was not long. As soon as it was read, we were told that since it was late, discussions would take place next time. We could go home. There were no cheers, no boos. Nobody said a word. We trooped out of the room just as we had come in – with passive faces, heads slightly bowed to avoid unwittingly speaking with our eyes, moving slowly so as not to show excitement. We behaved as if we had no feelings one way or another because we were afraid. The news we had just heard was too startling, almost unbelievable. We were accustomed to sudden reverses of policy

by the Party, but nothing like this had ever happened before. To play safe, it was best not to appear to react. . . .

I entered my part of the house and locked the door. As I walked up the stairs, I started to smile. By the time I entered my room, I was thanking God fervently. But I cautioned myself not to be overoptimistic. Obviously the arrest of the Gang of Four was the result of a power struggle within the Party leadership. It did not necessarily mean that Hua Guofeng was going to repudiate the policy of Mao. . . . Nevertheless I spent a restless night speculating on the future and composing petitions seeking my own rehabilitation and the investigation of my daughter's death. . . .

The arrest of the Gang of Four was like the lifting of the tight lid of a boiling cauldron. Very quickly it overflowed. People with grievances came out to demand redress. There were demonstrations and protests by both individuals and groups . . . At the second plenum of the Central Committee, Hua Guofeng . . . promised that the Party and government would review all cases of victims of the Cultural Revolution. . . .

In November 1978, twelve years and two months after my arrest, I was officially rehabilitated and declared a victim of wrongful arrest and persecution. The rehabilitation document was read at a meeting of the Residents' Committee. . . .

1. What startling announcement was made at the meeting of the Resident Committee?

2. (a) How did people react to the news?

(b) Why?

3. (a) What was Mrs. Cheng's personal reaction?

(b) Why did she caution herself not to be overly optimistic?
