

**THE FORMER RED GUARD.** The tiny fourth-floor walk-up that Wang Keping shares with his mother, brother and sister is



Wang Keping: "Moving ahead slowly is better than not moving at all"

crowded with powerful wooden sculptures. There is a large twisted head of a man choking on a cylinder stuffed into his mouth. There is a bust of Jiang Qing in the shape of a rifle (power comes out of the barrel of a gun, said Chairman Mao). There is the severed head of a bureaucrat. "A head but no brains," Wang explains, "a nose but no nostrils, a mouth but no lips, in short, a bad cadre."

Wang, born in 1949 of a military family, is the same age as the People's Republic. As a teen-age Red Guard in the Cultural Revolution, he belonged to a rebel faction in his home town of Tianjin. There he once helped loot and burn a Roman Catholic church. Chastened by those outbursts, he has become a sculptor whose brooding images, carved from blocks of wood bought at a local firewood shop, show the evils of political fanaticism. "When I was a Red Guard," Wang says, pointing to his work, "I would have smashed all of this."

Officially a scriptwriter for Peking television, Wang only began sculpting about two years ago—and then by accident. "I happened to carve a piece of wood that had fallen off a chair," he recalls. "I didn't really know how to carve, but as a scriptwriter I had been influenced by the French theater of the absurd, especially Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*. So I decided to try to carve a kind of theater of the absurd in wood." Though many foreigners and Chinese alike have been impressed by the energy and originality of his work, he is not recognized as an official artist by the state, and thus cannot make a living by his sculpture.

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Excluded from official circles, Wang belongs instead to an unofficial group called the "Stars," which grew out of last year's Democracy Wall movement. This group of 26 artists was allowed last summer to show 160 works in Peking's main art museum—an important gesture toward openness in China. Wang's large, totemic figure of Mao, with one eye open and one eye shut, was the most controversial piece in the show, which drew between 4,000 and 7,000 visitors a day during its two-week run. Says Wang: "Today's leaders have made their ideas about economics very clear, but they have not yet decided about art and culture. Many of them are still afraid of Western influences, thinking that they are unworthy and immoral. The leaders have been isolated for such a long time that many of them are not very cultivated. But as living standards go up, there will be an effect on art and culture too. The best way to develop art is not to pay official attention to it at all."

"During the Democracy Wall period (when critical posters were tolerated by the authorities), we had feverish expectations, so we are disappointed with today's slowness—but we recognize that moving ahead slowly is better than not moving ahead at all. In fact, going too fast could bring a reaction from the conservatives, who continue to hold great power. Still, I think we shouldn't be afraid. The Chinese people have often been too afraid."

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## World

# "We Learned from Our Suffering"

*Chinese tell of the momentous changes sweeping their nation*

**W**ill it work? And how far can it go? These are the questions that the Chinese keep asking as their leaders search for ways to modernize the world's most populous nation. In the past two years these leaders have abandoned a rigid ideology in favor of a relatively free-wheeling pragmatism. Communist economic policies have been modified to give greater initiative to local factories and farms. The government has offered new latitude for artists and writers, and it has risked sending thousands of scholars and scientists to study in the capitalist West. Taken together, these peaceful changes could ultimately prove as profound as those that came with the armed Communist revolution in 1949.

Graves, TIME Managing Editor Ray Cave and Chief of Correspondents Richard Duncan; they were accompanied by Peking Bureau Chief Richard Bernstein. After a stay in Peking, the party visited agriculturally rich Sichuan province, where many of the current experiments in economic liberalization were first tried, then flew over the towering Hengduan Mountains to Lhasa, Tibet (average elevation: 16,000 ft. above sea level) and finally to the semitropical trading port of Canton some 3,000 miles to the southeast. The editors found a country obsessed with the "four modernizations"—the upgrading of industry, agriculture, science and technology, and the military—formally announced by then Vice Premier

primarily to pay bonuses to workers and buy additional raw materials and new equipment. Greatly expanded contacts with other countries, particularly the industrialized democracies of Japan and the West, have begun bringing China advanced technical knowledge and a growing impatience to liberalize still more. But this form of modernization has many hazards in a vast Communist state, a fact that China's new leaders are very much aware of. The ambitious, flexible programs that China has begun will produce tensions and fissures in a society long controlled by force and regimentation. Even as statues of Mao are vanishing all across China and the trial of the Gang of Four—which includes Mao's wife Jiang Qing—begins,