

# NIGHT WOLF IN A NIGHT MAN'S KINGDOM: THE STORY OF LI YUANLONG

BY LIU LU

A lawyer ponders the nature of a society that can treat a kind-hearted and patriotic journalist as an enemy of the state.

Li Yuanlong, a reporter with the *Bijie Daily* newspaper in Guizhou Province, was recently indicted for publishing four essays criticizing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). I accepted a request from Li Yuanlong's wife, Yang Xiumin, to represent him as his lawyer, and after reading his essays, I became greatly interested in the case. I went to Guizhou on March 13, 2006.

## Decoding "anti-Communist" articles

The four essays written by Li Yuanlong are: "Becoming an American Citizen in My Mind," "Ordinary Life, Pathetic Death," "The Party Secretary Who Continued His Meeting After Learning of His Mother's Death" and "A 100-Year-Old Man Joins the Party."

"Becoming an American Citizen in My Mind" pays tribute to the American political system and expresses a wish to become an American in spirit. In fact, as a human rights expert has observed, it's not a crime to take on actual American citizenship, so why should spiritual citizenship be a problem? Many outstanding Chinese such as Nobel physicists Yang Zhengning (Chen Ning Yang) and Li Zhengdao (Tsung-Dao Lee) became American citizens both legally and spiritually, but both have been received as guests of honor by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the government.

"Ordinary Life, Pathetic Death" criticizes the CCP for its propaganda surrounding the political exploitation of Liu Hulan, a child who sacrificed her life in the clash between ideologies.<sup>1</sup> Many mainland scholars and writers have made similar reflections, for example, Di Ma's<sup>2</sup> essay "How Liu Wenxue Died," about another teenage Communist hero.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the CCP long ago stopped encouraging teenagers to join the Party or sacrifice their lives.

"The Party Secretary Who Continued His Meeting After Learning of His Mother's Death" criticizes the inhumane behavior of a certain low-ranking Party cadre. There is nothing wrong with the theme of this essay. Refusing to attend his old mother's funeral, due more likely to personal ambition than to

devotion to the Party, is unreasonable behavior that tarnishes the image of the CCP.

"A 100-Year-Old Man Joins the Party" criticizes a certain Party branch for bragging about its acceptance of a 100-year-old man as a member. Recruiting a 100-year-old man violates CCP principles and is bound to create misunderstandings over how Party membership is promoted.

In summation, all of the subjects of Li Yuanlong's criticism are real people with real stories. Of course, the essays ultimately damage the image of the CCP, but they make no mention of state authority, let alone attack it or incite its overthrow. To this writer, it appears that the Guizhou judicial authorities equate the Party with state authority, and criticism of the CCP with inciting subversion. This premise does not stand up under scrutiny of fact or logic.

## Meeting "Night Wolf"

On March 14, I accompanied a local lawyer to the Bijie Detention Center to meet Li Yuanlong. The corrections officers checked my lawyer's license, introductory letter and contract and the indictment documents from the Bijie Procuratorate, then promptly arranged the meeting.

The weather was cold. Li Yuanlong, draped in a military overcoat, appeared frail and gentle, a typical scholar in no way resembling his pen name, "Night Wolf".

The local lawyer said, "This is Lawyer Li from Shandong Province. He's providing you with free legal assistance." (In fact, my expenses were being covered by the Independent Chinese PEN Center, but I did not bother to explain this at the time.)

Li Yuanlong's face showed gratitude. "Thanks. Thank you very much, Lawyer Li."

I asked him, "Are you doing all right in there? Your friends are very concerned about you."

Li said, "I'm OK, I'm being looked after. Please thank my friends."

Our exchange continued:

**Lawyer:** You've seen the indictment documents, haven't you? What are your reactions?

**Li:** I admit I'm "guilty," but I don't recognize their law. Their law was made to target people like me. I have no intention of

# Letter from Guangzhou

Dear Tom:

I am quite comfortable in Guangzhou after five years of teaching here. I visited Fudan University in Shanghai recently and spoke to a class there as well as to a group of graduate students at Shanghai's East China Normal University. Good, lively kids, as good as the ones we've been teaching in Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (Guangwai). But I did not see evidence of much vision or innovation at Fudan, despite its good reputation in China.

In China generally I don't see journalism programs run by people really able to come to terms with the vast changes in news media. The programs are so highly academic, as are the faculty, that I wonder if they serve any purpose.

My concern has deepened with the experiences of some of my students after they became the first graduates last July of the English-language program that started here in the fall of 2001. I'm beginning to feel that under the restrictive conditions that exist in China, it might be more realistic to send aspiring journalists to Party schools for training in what they are supposed to write and how to write it, and in that way avoid raising expectations that will not be met. Otherwise, the system here will crush some of these good students.

I've written about my concerns in a brief article the students in Guangzhou asked me to write for a campus publication. I'm not sure, but I feel they won't use the article:

What concerns me more than ever in the five years I've taught journalism at Guangwai is what happens to our students when they enter the real world of journalism in China. I am already uneasy when I learn of the experiences of some of our most recent graduates.

For example: a student at a daily newspaper in Guangzhou wanted to write an article about Americans coming to Guangzhou to adopt Chinese babies. The story is timely; more Americans than ever are coming to Guangzhou to adopt children, and the subject is full of human interest of the sort that readers enjoy. The student asked if I knew families in the United States with Chinese adopted sons or daughters. I gave the student the names of two families, and I sent her stories from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* about the subject.

She never wrote the story. The editor said the authorities did not want stories in the newspaper about American adoptions of Chinese.

A recent graduate surfing the Net came across the Web site of a gay bar in Guangzhou. The graduate called the bar owner and interviewed him on the telephone. She spoke to a leader of a gay and lesbian organization in Guangzhou. She called Beijing and spoke to a professor who has studied the gay community in China. The graduate wrote a story and presented it to her editor.

The editor was wary. First, he said, he would not publish the story during the National People's Congress—the timing was not right. He also struck out a comment from the professor in Beijing claiming that 7 percent of the Chinese population was homosexual. The editor explained that the government's official estimate was that 3 to 4 percent of the population was gay, and he did not want to print an opposing view.

Another recent graduate wrote a travel story for her publication about the island of Bali. She mentioned the rituals

of the largely Hindu population there. Her reference was censored. No religion, she was told.

What do such situations do to a young reporter? There are the experiences of even more experienced journalists. At an English-language newspaper near Guangdong, one editor spent eight months at a top journalism school in the United States, planning to make improvements to his newspaper. When he returned home, he discovered half of the newspaper staff had been fired, and in fact, he himself no longer had a job as editor.

The same situation faced a friend in Shanghai, who spent a year on a fellowship with other foreign and U.S. journalists at a prestigious university. He and his colleagues had private, off-the-record meetings and frank discussions with a senior U.S. government official formerly associated with the university, and met many other notables while attending classes by well known professors. He, too, had big plans for his publications, but after he returned to China he discovered that the authority to make decisions for the paper had been centralized in Beijing. He could achieve nothing.

These are stories that make me wonder about teaching journalism at universities in China. Why do I continue? The students I meet are keen, motivated, hoping to make an impact on their society, worthy of being taught.

The news is not all grim. Some are having a great time, like the July '05 graduate taking photos for the Nanfang Group in Guangzhou, the sports-minded writer in his first job reporting on soccer for a sports newspaper in Shenzhen, a woman who found and wrote a story about a psychiatrist treating concubines depressed because their lovers won't marry them.

For them I have only my experience in the business of news reporting and writing and the hope that some day, they may enjoy working in the news media as I have done.

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Postscript: The campus publication did not publish Zeitlin's article.

inciting subversion of state authority. I just want this country to become democratic and free through a peaceful transition. I can't accept that there's anything wrong with this.

**Lawyer:** We'll discuss that question later. Do you want to talk about the allegations in the indictment?

**Li:** Yes. I admit that I wrote those articles, but I didn't use a Hot-mail account to send them out. The emails were sent by my son, who didn't know anything about the content. I wrote the articles out by hand initially, and then typed them into the computer, mostly for practice. It gave me a sense of accomplishment to see my articles saved in the computer, and then sent out by email. That's why there are two versions: hand-written and electronic.

**Lawyer:** What led you to write these articles in the first place?

**Li:** There were three reasons. First of all, as a journalist working at a Party newspaper, I spend all day telling lies and writing propaganda. It gives me such an oppressive feeling, I long for an opportunity to say what's in my heart. Secondly, the reality of today's China—huge income disparity, official corruption, judicial injustice and media control—makes me feel there is a need for change in Chinese society. As an intellectual, I should criticize and expose these phenomena. Thirdly, I've accessed information from overseas through the Internet, and my thinking has been influenced by some liberal intellectuals.

**Lawyer:** How were you discovered?

**Li:** When I sent in my first article, "Becoming an American Citizen in My Mind," I didn't yet know how to use a computer, so my son helped me send it. Four days later, I accessed the ChinaWeekly Web site and found the essay posted under my real name. I was worried about exposing my identity, so I asked a friend to call the editor straightaway and have the byline changed to Ye Haolang, or "Night Wolf." My subsequent articles were published under that pen name, and I guess that's how State Security connected me with the essays.

**Lawyer:** The fact that you wrote articles criticizing the Chinese Communist Party doesn't mean you've broken any law, much less does it constitute inciting subversion of state authority. Their allegations that your articles fabricate, distort and exaggerate facts for the purpose of inciting subversion of state authority and overthrowing the socialist system are not substantiated by fact or logical analysis.

**Li:** They say I fabricated the fact that 80 million people died under Chinese Communist rule, and that tanks were used to crush students to death on June 4th—I got this information from the Internet. They should show their more authoritative facts if they want to refute what I wrote.

**Lawyer:** You can say all this in court. We will plead not guilty and defend you on the basis of the law.

The impression I gained is that Li Yuanlong has been under enormous pressure in the course of the investigation. Even his son, a high school senior, was dragged in and interrogated three times. Such cruel treatment has brought him close to psychological collapse. He is on the brink of incriminating himself in hopes of obtaining more "tolerant" treatment for his son.

### Spring sun, morning haze

What struck me most since taking on Li Yuanlong's case is that he's merely a conscientious journalist with a kind heart, a person known throughout Bijie City as a "great guy." On his meager salary, he has supported three impoverished children to attend school all the way through university. One of them was even admitted to Peking University. Following his arrest, Li's first request from his cell was to ask his wife to continue paying tuition for these students.

The local media reacted passionately to Li's arrest. Many of his colleagues have written testimonials describing his many good deeds and demanding his release. In private, a number of prosecutors, judges and government officials have expressed the view that Li Yuanlong should not be convicted.

Since leaving Guizhou Province, I have not been able to dismiss from my mind two phrases that are both pronounced "ye lang": "Night Wolf" and "Night Man." Guizhou used to be called Yelang State, or the "Night Man's Kingdom," because of the narrow vision of its ruler during the Warring States era. Like a frog at the bottom of a well who thinks the patch of sky it sees is all the sky there is, this ruler saw his land as bigger than all the rest of China. Today's Guizhou has entered the Information Age, but the mindset of its judicial authorities remains stuck in the mode of the Night Man's Kingdom. Otherwise, why would there be closed-minded people who regard legitimate criticism as threats, and treat this most patriotic and kind-hearted of journalists as a "Night Wolf" who endangers the nation?

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Translated by Meng Yiu

The original Chinese article was posted on HRIC's *RenYu Renquan* Web site: [http://www.renyurenquan.org/ryrq\\_article.adp?article\\_id=429](http://www.renyurenquan.org/ryrq_article.adp?article_id=429)

### NOTES

1. Mao Zedong extolled Liu Hulan in his essay "Great Life, Glorious Death" after Liu was beheaded by the Kuomintang for killing a village chief who was collaborating with the KMT. Barely 15 years old at the time of her death, Liu was the CCP's youngest member.
2. Di Ma is the pen name for Wang Jie, a Shaanxi-based writer.
3. According to post-liberation lore, Liu Wenxue, a 14-year-old Sichuan peasant boy, was strangled by a landlord whom he caught stealing chili peppers from his village's communal farm.