

THE BOOMERANG EFFECT

BY YANG LILI

Does a Western education produce more enlightened Chinese officials, or merely better equip a new generation of tyrants?

Shortly after marrying his first wife, he cheated on her with the babysitter. He then divorced his wife and married the babysitter. Then he hired a killer to murder and dismember his second wife under cover of night (some say it was in broad daylight). This sounds like a crime committed by a young thug in imperial China, or the actions of a criminal gang. But the lead character in this story is Lü Debin, Vice-Governor of Henan Province, a former college professor who returned to China after several years of graduate school in the United States.

Stories of Communist officials willing to commit murder for power, influence and sex have become commonplace in China. What makes the case of Lü Debin noteworthy is his years of study in the U.S. How could someone who breathed the air of democracy and freedom become a vicious killer upon returning to China? How could someone commit such an outrage after living in the civilized world?

The answer to this question is complex and at the same time quite simple, so simple that it can be expressed in a sentence: In the sociopolitical context of modern China, these returned students, who once inspired great expectations among Chinese people, have become no better than writhing tapeworms feasting on the bowels of society as the means and ends of their survival.

Twenty-six years ago, when China put the Maoist era behind it and opened its doors to the world, hordes of Chinese students went abroad to study, some sponsored by the government and some paying their own way. When these students returned to China after graduating from foreign universities, the people called them the Tenth Generation of Returnees. Official statistics put their number at 160,000. The number of returned students has been growing by more than 13 percent per year. If we exclude returned students who studied in autocratic countries and rogue states—such as Zhang Dejiang, secretary of the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee, who studied at Kim Il Sung University—a fair estimate of the number of returned students currently in China would be 100,000

to 200,000. These returnees make up a tiny percentage of China's total population of 1.3 billion, but compared with the number of returned students at the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and in the early years of the Republican period (1911–1949), they are by no means an insignificant number. Regrettably, these eagles who once soared on the wings of freedom cease flying once they return to China. In this vast, mute land their voices are not heard.

Instead, the knights who battle the dragon of tyranny are home-grown intellectuals such as Liu Xiaobo, Yu Jie and Wang Yi, and doctors and lawyers such as Gao Yaojie, Pu Zhiqiang and Guo Guoting,¹ who do all in their power to protect the rights of the people. While it's true that returnees have given us the penetrating analysis of Wang Xiaobo² and Chen Danqing's³ ire against the Chinese education system, their numbers are insignificant in comparison with the vast majority of returned students.

People jokingly refer to the returned students as “sea turtles,”⁴ because they go silently about their business amid the noise of the world. Yet there is a difference between the silence of returned students and the silence of turtles. In the West, turtlelike detachment and reticence is thought to be the hallmark of wise and philosophical people, but these returnees remain silent not because they are above worldly considerations, but because they are worldly-wise and prefer to play it safe. To remain silent under a reign of terror in exchange for money, status or vested interests is a particularly ugly crime.

Lured by the promise of power, the returned students have abandoned their professional and academic specialties and have become parasites of the Chinese Communist regime.

If the collective silence of the returnees is not indicative enough of the depths to which they have sunk, more damning is the way in which they have abetted the crimes of the Communist tyrants. Lured by the promise of power, influence and money, the returned students have abandoned their professional and academic specialties and have become parasites⁵ of

the Chinese Communist regime. According to rough statistics, almost 100 returned students serve as officials at the provincial ministerial level or above, approximately 1,000 have become officials at the vice-provincial ministerial level, and some 10,000 below the vice-provincial ministerial level.

Returned students who choose to become government officials because they want to apply the new concepts and ideas they learned in developed countries to gradually change the Communist regime give little cause for criticism. But the bitter truth is that most returnees who join the government are attracted by the prospect of wielding immense power. All too willingly squandering their hard-earned skills as grist for the regime's mill, they become virtually indistinguishable from uneducated, corrupt officials who never left China. That's why returnees like Vice-Governor Lü Debin, obsessed with sex and treating human life like straw, are by no means rare.

While some returned students have become officials of the Communist regime, others have sold their souls to become its technological lackeys. The most despicable among them are IT experts who design and implement the regime's "Golden Shield" project, using technologies they learned in developed countries to install censorship firewalls that block access to banned Web pages and track sensitive words and expressions. China has become the world leader in the hacker attacks that normal countries condemn, as well as in Internet censorship and the imprisonment of Internet dissidents.

Taking a human being's life as Lü Debin did is an unpardonable crime. Using your knowledge and technical skills to help tyrants muzzle tens of millions of people and make them criminally liable for their every move may be a less spectacular crime, but it is certainly no more excusable.

We must not fail to mention the "semi-returnees" who have come back from the United States in recent years. Semi-returnees are those who have a green card or U.S. citizenship and retain children and property in the U.S., and who return to China only to make a quick buck. Most of them obtained permanent residence in the U.S. after the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989. The U.S. is where their children were born and raised, and where they have enjoyed the benefits of the free world, utterly indifferent to the suffering of their compatriots across the sea. Lured by the promise of wealth and position, they have returned in recent years to kneel at the bloodstained feet of the Communist dictators, trading their conscience and morality for a bowl of the regime's gruel.

The moral degradation of this Tenth Generation signals the success of the Chinese Communist regime, the tragedy of the Chinese people and the failure of the West's cultural policy toward China. On May 19, U.S. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi delivered an impassioned speech in which she dubbed America's government's China policy "a total failure." Pelosi criticized first of all the spiraling U.S. trade deficit with China and secondly the American failure to restrict the export of sensitive technology to China. It's safe to say that if Pelosi were

aware of all the activities of Chinese returnees from the U.S., she would be equally unsparing in her criticism of America's policy of admitting foreign students.

For more than two decades, the U.S. has given countless Chinese graduate students generous scholarships to cover tuition and living expenses at American universities. These U.S.-trained graduates have now become "entrepreneurs with ruby-studded caps," "assistants to high officials," and the "emperor's hatchet men."⁶ The American hope that returned students would have a positive effect on Chinese politics has not materialized. The Chinese Communist regime is still a crouching tiger in the east, and the infusion of new blood in the form of experts in science and technology has made it more menacing than ever.

On May 25, Senator Joe Lieberman of the Democratic Party and Senator Lamar Alexander of the Republic Party introduced the United States-China Cultural Engagement Act, which authorizes \$1.3 billion in federal funds over five years, between 2006 and 2011, for cultural exchanges between the U.S. and China, particularly Chinese language instruction in American schools and student exchange programs in elementary, middle and high schools. It seems that members of Congress still believe that cultural exchanges will spur China's democratization. But if they fail to critically examine the costly policy of Sino-American cultural exchanges that they have pursued for more than 20 years, they risk continuing down the same disastrous road of aiding the blood-stained Chinese Communist regime.

Translated by Paul Frank

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NOTES

1. Liu Xiaobo, Yu Jie and Wang Yi are outspoken intellectuals who have been subjected to official intimidation. Gao Yaojie is a doctor advocating the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. Pu Zhiqiang and Guo Guoting are lawyers who provide legal defense for dissidents.
2. Wang Xiaobo was a novelist known for his penetrating and somewhat satirical views of society, which were attributed to his years of study abroad. He died in 1997 at the age of 45.
3. Chen Danqing, who went to the U.S. in 1982, was one of the first Chinese artists to make a living abroad. After living in New York for 18 years, he returned to China in 2000 to teach art at Tsinghua University. Since his return, Chen has been outspoken about the shortcomings of art education in China.
4. The Chinese term for "sea turtle," *haiqiu*, sound the same as that for someone returning from overseas.
5. Literally, "maggots in the soysauce jar."
6. The writer employs terms from China's dynastic history. During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) wealthy officials often wore caps decorated with rubies.