ON THE ARREST OF PO YANG BY THE NATIONALIST CHINESE GOVERNMENT

Can a government suppress truth, persecute intellectuals and still hope to survive as a free nation? It is sad indeed to learn how a thriving outpost of freedom, the Republic of China on Taiwan, has been persecuting a literary scholar for more than a year by secret arrest, totalitarian tactics, and prolonged imprisonment. Sadder still, the victim is Taiwan's talented and popular writer.

He is Kuo Yi-tung (顧衣桐), also known under the pen name of Po Yang (柏楊). This 49-year-old novelist recently turned social critic is unfamiliar to most Americans because he has not been translated into English nor has he ever visited America. But he has come to understand, respect, and even worship the United States through his extensive reading. In writing his daily newspaper columns, he uses a unique style that may be best pictured by the irreverent satire of Russel Baker coupled with the lucid analysis of James Reston. He would be a favorite of Westerners if ever translated out of the Chinese. Even in Taiwan, where humor and democratic thoughts are not truly respected, his social and political commentaries have been widely read, and his forty odd volumes of published work have enjoyed phenomenal sales, some reaching 18 editions. It would not be a surprise someday if history records Po Yang as the greatest Chinese writer in the last few decades.

As one might anticipate, he is an avant-garde in Taiwan. His brave voice is both loved and hated. He is loved by most people for his impassioned quest for truth, his uncompromising defense of human dignity, and his stinging indictment of political corruption and moral degeneration. Yet he is hated by some of those in ruling circles, whose wrongdoings have become target of his criticism. And so personal emnities, as well as dictatorial tradition of those in power, have all contributed to his present persecution.

About a year ago, on March 3, 1968, Po Yang was silenced by secret arrest. Following prolonged investigations, the Taiwan Provincial Garrison Command has charged him with "treason". The initial excuse for
his arrest was the charge that he had insulted the highest authority of the land, President Chiang Kai-Shek, by translating and publishing an American created Popeye cartoon. In these strips (King Features, October 6-13, 1967) Popeye tries to persuade his son to elect him president of an island where father and son are the sole inhabitants. Since Taiwan is an island now ruled by the Chiang family, this is an implicit affront, in oriental psychology, to the sacred land and its divine leaders, and hence an insult to President Chiang Kai-Shek and his son, General Ching-kuo. This was only the beginning.

Other charges were then fabricated. The classical scheme, invented and practiced by the ruling class in China long before Senator Joe McCarthy, is the technique of communist witch-hunting. Delving into his past, some 20 years ago when he escaped from mainland China, they have "found" he had dinner together with a communist. They said he attended a communist sponsored brain-washing school. He was accused for getting military information for the communist. The information at issue concerned the number of bicycles a Kuomintang troop of about 200 men then possessed at Peiping.

Further accusations have been made. He has been charged with anti-social behavior, due to loss of maternal love in childhood, and evidenced by his divorce and remarriage; with the reading of leftist literature in high school; and more seriously, with the causing of a rift between the people and the Chinese government.

His accusers have blindly or purposely ignored the fact that he studied not only communist literature, but also Chinese classics and Western thoughts on democracy. His masterly expose of communist barbarism in his recent writings is superior to most publications including official government propagandas. His patriotic fervor, often vividly expressed in many of his writings, manifests a deep compassion of human love. The accusers have also forgotten that their leader, General Chiang Ching-kuo, was educated in Russia and had association with Russian communists years ago.

The suppression and distortion of facts are not uncommon to the Chinese people—and rulers alike, in the last hundreds of years. If anything, Po Yang has tried relentlessly, to open their eyes to the modern
world. The distance between the rulers and the ruled has been great in China. Contrary to the accusation, in many of Po Yang's writings one finds numerous evidences where he has tried to bridge the gap of mistrust, mistreatment, and misunderstanding between the people and the government.

To those who have read Po Yang's work and studied the case, the charges are ridiculously childish. Yet all these charges appear seriously in black and white in the prosecutor's official Indictment.

A further concrete evidence of the unjust treatment is the fact that the arrest, though carried out more than a year ago, has never been reported in the press. News from personal contact leaks out that he is now under secret military trial. The prosecutor is asking either a death sentence or prolonged imprisonment.

Since his arrest, his family has suffered untold hardship. All income ceased when his publishing business was forced to close. Being in jail, he can no longer continue his job as associate editor for the Taipei Independence Evening Post, nor as a professor of Chinese literature at the Chinese Institute of Arts. His wife, a novelist in her own right, must support their young daughter. She has lost her own job in the government broadcasting company because of guilt by association—a Chinese tradition still prevailing in society. It was rumored that twice he has asked for a divorce to remove political stigma in order for her to lead a normal life.

Po Yang understood the difference between America and China when he wrote aphoristically: "In America, knowledge (truth) is power; in China, power is knowledge (truth)." This is a strong condemnation of China's power worshippers. One could not help but to hope that the power at Taiwan that threatens individual freedom should become knowledge to the outside world; and that the knowledge of Po Yang's persecution today should become the power of his salvation tomorrow. Our knowledge must awaken the Chinese power—a power that should be used to pursue, rather than suppress freedom.

In the last decade, the Nationalist Government at Taiwan has made great strides in economical and educational development. Unless political advances can follow the trend, Taiwan's role as the symbol and stronghold of free China could not endure.
Po Yang needs help. In reality, it is the Chinese people, and specially the Nationalist Chinese Government that need help even more desperately—perhaps contrary to their own belief or ignorance. Freedom and justice are meaningless expressions unless followed by action. A plea for a public and fair trial for Po Yang seems to be sensible and just, particularly to those who are accustomed to the American way of thinking. Friends of China would find it prudent to plead directly, or indirectly through American prestige, to the real power in Taiwan, namely General Chiang Ching-kuo (the Minister of Defense, Ministry of Defense, Taipei, Taiwan) on behalf of Po Yang and justice. Helping a people to escape from an attack of the totalitarian disease should be the privilege of a free citizen.

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