Dear Editor:

Nationalist China has always been an enigma to American people. Of its economic development we regularly have reports of impressive progress made on the island of Taiwan. Of its political arena, much less is reported. Which is not to say that everything is nice and quiet there. Little is reported mostly because the government is determined that its anachronistic political practices should not be allowed to tarnish the rosy image it has been trying to project to the foreign audience.

Yet, despite the regime's diligent effort to suppress political news, information about political persecutions emerge out.

One case in progress involves a man by the name of Kuo I-tung (郭衣洞), better known to the island's reading public as Po Yang (柏楊), his pen name.

Until recently silenced, Po Yang has been a prolific writer whose commentaries on political and social affairs were read daily by tens of thousands in the leading newspapers on the island and whose collected works have expanded to a massive 23 volumes. His impassioned quest for truth, uncompromising defense of human dignity, and his stinging indictment of political corruption and moral degeneration have earned him the hearty endorsement of the Chinese readers in Taiwan and abroad, as can be witnessed by the phenomenal sale of his works, some of which have reached an 18th edition within four or five years. At the same time, he has been bitterly hated by those high in the ruling circles whose wrongdoing became the target of his criticism. On March 4, 1968, he was
arrested by the Taiwan Provincial Garrison Command on charges of treason. The immediate cause leading to the arrest was his translation of the American comic strip Popeye, in which Popeye tries to persuade his son to elect him president of an island where they are the only two inhabitants. Although perfectly innocuous in itself, this was interpreted by the sensitive Nationalist authorities as an affront to President Chiang Kai-shek and his son, General Chiang Ching-kuo, a likely successor, and currently the Minister of National Defense.

Since his arrest, Po Yang has been subjected to various forms of psychological and physical pressures. The government interrogators took an active part in fabricating facts so that he might be linked with some dubious activities alleged to have taken place twenty years ago. More specifically, the government charged him guilty of anti-social mentality due to loss of maternal love in early childhood, of reading leftist literature while in high school, and of receiving communist assistance while fleeing from the Mainland. But since a public trial would provide the defendant with a chance to repudiate these charges or to contradict them by presenting his own witnesses, the entire legal proceedings had been shrouded in utter secrecy to the extent that most people on the island know practically nothing about them. News had come recently, however, that the secret trial is drawing to a conclusion and that the prosecutor is asking either a death sentence or a long prison term.

Since his arrest, Po Yang's family has suffered untold hardship. All income ceased. His publishing company was forced to close business. His wife, a novelist in her own right, lost her job in a government
broadcasting company because of guilt by association. Twice he asked her to sign a divorce document in order to remove the political stigma from her and enable her to lead a normal life. But she refused.

If a death sentence is indeed handed down, it is probably the most befitting ending to the distinguished career of a man who withheld nothing in serving his people. Nevertheless, the personal tragedy of this one man cannot help but force us to focus once again on the stark reality of the so-called "freedom" of the Republic of China. It furnishes us with the most cogent explanation as to why thousands of the best Chinese young intellectuals flock to this country each year, yet so few ever go back. It also serves as a reminder to the people of this country that, after all, their staunchest ally in the cold war is just as capable of flaunting the principles of democracy and justice as their most heinous communist adversaries.

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