

PROTECTED TO DEATH: A PETITIONER'S STORY

BY ZHOU HOUWEN

Wang Youyun, a petitioner taking refuge beneath one of Beijing's overpasses, seeks justice for her son, Wang Yinglin, a tax official who died under suspicious circumstances after reporting the corruption of his boss.¹

In the past six years Wang Youyun has traveled to Beijing 23 times. Recounting her story revives feelings of sorrow and regret, but still she tells it: Her son, Wang Yinglin, worked for the tax department of DaYe City. One day he confided to her that the department head, Lei Taiyin, had misappropriated more than 10 million yuan in public funds. "I had always raised him to be a just person, to honor and follow the law," Wang Youyun says. For this reason, on the night of January 16, 1997 Wang Youyun accompanied her son to file a report against Lei at the tax department in Huang Shi City. As supporting documents Wang Yinglin presented 55 of Lei's deposit receipts, which totaled more than 84,700,000 yuan in embezzled funds. At this point in the story, Wang Youyun is overcome with grief. "Who could have guessed that by taking my son there I was leading him to his death? My heart is filled with despair."

Afterwards, Wang Yinglin was detained in Huang Shi for further inquiries and Wang Youyun returned to Da Ye alone. The following day, Wang Yinglin's wife, Peng Suzhen, received a telephone call from someone at the municipal Party Discipline Committee telling her, "Wang's report is currently under review, and he cannot return home because he has been put under witness protection." Discipline Committee member Cheng Jiangqing and Ju Jiangshen of the Huang Shi Procuratorate were assigned to investigate the case. From this point on, Wang Yinglin was detained under "protection" in room 105 of the Dianli Hotel in Huang Shi. He never went home.

Having been "under protection" for 316 days, Wang Yinglin died on the night of November 11, 1997. His family was told that Wang had hung himself the day before by wrapping a piece of rope, originally attached to a key, around a metal curtain rod, and that attempts to revive him had failed. Wang was 36 years old. Wang's family was immediately suspicious. How could Wang have hung himself with a rope less than half a meter long from a pipe 1.3 meters from the ground when he

was 1.68 meters tall? Wang Youyun demanded to see the evidence for the suicide ruling. She also asked for her son's body be cleaned and prepared for burial, but both requests were denied.

On December 2, police units were dispatched to the Huang Shi funeral home where Wang's body was kept. A relative, Xu Shuifa, recalls that it was almost impossible for family members to view the body, as each was flanked by two police officers. It was under this level of "protection" and surveillance that Wang's family said their final goodbyes. Wang Youyun had worked as a doctor before, and when she managed an opportunity to examine her son's body, she found it covered with wounds. She immediately demanded that the body be placed under protection for examination by a coroner at her own expense, but this was refused. Family members were quickly forced into police vehicles and escorted back to Da Ye.

On December 4, Wang's family members received 44,000 yuan from the Procuratorate as "compensation," and were told that his body had been cremated on December 2. Wang's mother and wife were overcome with grief.

What really happened during those 316 days?

On July 2, 1997, the Huang Shi accounting office drafted a report in relation to the alleged misappropriation of funds. This report stated that from 1993 to 1996, Da Ye's tax department had diverted public funds totaling more than 11,100,000 yuan into a private account, and that at least 440,000 yuan in expenditures were unaccounted for. The report noted that no records had been found for the private account, which was controlled by Lei Taiyin. However, during the investigation conducted by the Party Discipline Committee, Lei and Wang received exactly the opposite treatment from what might be expected.

On April 15, 1999, a senior tax department official, Gui Mingyan, wrote an article revealing the background of the case. He said that Wang Yinglin's report sounded a death knell for Lei Taiyin and others, and they immediately began scurrying for cover. Lei first elicited the help of Ke Hanming, a senior official in the Supreme People's Procuratorate and a native of Da Ye. He then approached Yuan Jianjun at the Huang She Procuratorate. In this way, despite clear evidence of wrongdoing, the Huang Shi Procuratorate chose not to pursue the



Petitioners waiting outside of the State Council Complaint Bureau in Beijing. Photo: Reuters

case against Lei Taiyin, but instead diverted its full attentions to Wang Yinglin.

Lei's close friend Fu Jingshui sat on the Party Discipline Committee, and he exerted all of his influence to protect Lei. The head of the tax department's investigation unit, Huang Yanqing, also acted on behalf of Lei. There was also Da Ye's Deputy Party Secretary Zhou Jinshong, formerly Da Ye's Chief Procurator and an in-law of Lei's. From top to bottom the direction of the investigation changed to focus on Wang Yinglin.

Gui Mingyan noted that a number of people who alleged Lai Taiyin's wrongdoing ended up dead or persecuted. Apart from the unexplained death of Wang Yinglin, Liu Heying, former vice-head of the Da Ye tax department, was detained by the Da Ye Procuratorate for a full year without due process. Liu's case was neither reviewed nor dismissed. In fact, Wang Yinglin was not the first person to raise questions about Lei Taiyin. According to Gui Mingyan, Lei came under investigation in 1993. But while covertly investigating the misappropriation of funds, Ke Xiyi, the head of the local tax office in Cheng Guan, died of unknown causes. In 1994, Min Recai of the Tong Wu Shan tax office also died. Even in his private life Lei was a hazard to life and limb. According to Gui Mingyan, "While driving his official car on unauthorized business, Lei struck and killed three people."

The Huang Shi Party Discipline Committee concluded that Lei had "committed crimes against the Party, but not against

the law." But within three months, before he could be expelled from the Party and relieved of his position at the Da Ye tax department, Lei was transferred to another position at the Xiao Gan tax department. No case was ever established against Ju Jiangshen and Cheng Jianqin, the two officials suspected of involvement in Wang Yinglin's death.

Wang Youyun has resorted to begging in the streets while living under a Beijing overpass as she seeks justice for her son. She wonders, "In what kind of society do we live, where witnesses are silenced, corrupt officials are protected, the law is compromised and citizens are deceived?"

Translated by TingTing Cheng

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