

Mistresses, money and murder: The life of a party cadre

CORRUPT CONTINUED FROM P1
Wang's case was the latest in a string of sex scandals involving party cadres and their mistresses, a subject that has become a target of popular ridicule among Chinese netizens.

“When a mistress is in the way, she simply must die.”

One widely copied blog entry, for example, issued theme-based awards for the mistress keepers. Categories included “The Award of Quantity” for Xu Qiyao, ex-head of construction in Jiangsu Province, who amassed 146 mistresses, and “The Award of Academic Study” for the bizarre habits of Li Qingshan, former head of the Hainan Textile Department, for writing sex diaries and keeping hair samples from 236 different women.

CORRUPTION

The Chinese public might have dismissed the phenomenon as just another willful indulgence among the political elite, if the cost to the nation's resources were not so great. The young women who give themselves to men their fathers' age do so for a price. Cars, houses, and pocket money for services and loyalty are bankrolled with embezzled funds.

The growing mistress constituency, flush with disposable income, has also helped drive China's luxury consumption.

A report on the subject by HSBC says China's is “a local luxury-goods market that is probably the only male-driven one on the planet,” adding that urban concubines are behind much of the luxury splurging.

Since the official salaries of even high-ranking party cadres cannot cover such extravagances, the spoils of bribery fill the breach. In his 2003 diary, Wang Cheng, then on a 19,200 yuan (C\$2,940) annual salary, planned to rake in at least 100,000 yuan (C\$15,320) to support his corrupt habits. Even so, Wang falls far short of his higher-ranked counterparts, who may easily spend millions of yuan on their female companions.

According to an official report, 106,000 officials were found guilty of corruption in 2009, an increase of 2.5 percent over the previous year, while the number of government officials caught embezzling more than one million yuan (C\$153,220) increased by 19 percent. Another report said over 95 percent of party cadres found guilty in recent years had kept mistresses.

MURDER

Pillaging public funds to keep mistresses is only half the story, however. In recent years an alarming trend has emerged of officials resorting to murder when their mistresses become a burden.

In a May 25 post, well-known Chinese blogger Zhang Hongfeng listed the 12 most grisly cases of corrupt officials murdering their mistresses, based on media reports.

In a 2005 case, former head of the Yunan Provincial Party Committee,

Yang Guoqu, cut his mistress into pieces with a kitchen knife and cooked them in a pressure cooker, attempting to pulp the flesh. When this failed he stored the pieces in his refrigerator before being caught.

In a 2007 case, a police chief placed a bomb under his mistress's car seat and set it off with a cell-phone-shaped detonator when she stepped inside. The explosion ripped her in half.

Others have been equally sinister but somewhat more cautious, opting to hire hit men to kill their unwanted companions.

“These mistress killers share one thing in common,” Zhang wrote in his widely quoted blog. “They all have a successful political career. The party either has already placed them in important positions, or is about to do so.”

In most cases, the killed woman either asked for more money than the official wanted to give, or was jealous of the official's other mistresses and threatened to report the man to his superiors. “For the corrupt officials, their political future is the most important thing,” Zhang writes. “When a mistress is in the way, she simply must die.”

The authorities' exploitation of their social privilege has undermined their legitimacy, leading to a conspicuous polarization of wealth, and a commensurate hatred toward the rich and powerful.

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Chinese were shocked when a 42-year-old physician stabbed 13 children with a fruit knife on March 23, at the gate of an elementary school in Nanping City, Fujian Province, killing nine. Over the following three days, three similar violent outbursts took place in different provinces. The criminals appeared to target the most prestigious schools in the region, which are attended by the children of communist officials and the nouveau riche.

Shortly after the Nanping case, a local elementary school student unwittingly crystallized the public's sentiments in a school assignment, a letter to the killer Zheng Minsheng. “If you can't hold back your hatred,” he wrote in the letter, “go kill the corrupt officials! How could you kill innocent children?”

In no time “go kill the corrupt officials!” became the next Internet meme to be chattered about among Chinese netizens.

Geologist reveals mass grave after decades of fear

MASS GRAVES CONTINUED FROM P1

Out of fear of reprisal if the communist regime learned of his find, Alexandrov decided to bury his gruesome discovery deep within himself.

“After that I hid and lived with fear,” he said. “I could have been killed by NKVD (the Soviet secret police) if I had blabbed about the burial place, which would have been considered a disclosure of evidence of a crime.”

It was not until some 20 years later, as the Soviet Union was starting to crumble, that Alexandrov saw news reports in the state-run media mentioning that some remains had been found.

The NKVD had become interested in finding the mass graves of the victims of political persecution. From the Irkutsk regional department, where Pivovarikha village was located, the NKVD formed a special task force of agents to carry out the operation.

The agents, however, failed to find the graves, leading people to use a phrase popular at the time against

the department head: “Can't you find the burial places? Then how are [you] going to catch spies?”

During this period, Alexandrov was chairman of a human rights movement called Memorial in Irkutsk. He was contacted by the NKVD.

The NKVD had a secret list of possible mass graves, but Pivovarikha was not among them. Alexandrov told them about the graves he had found. When his tip bore fruit, the NKVD asked him how he had known.

“I could not tell the head of regional NKVD office that I had kept silent for 20 years fearing being killed by the service,” he said.

Eventually, an investigation showed that about 17,000 people had been shot and buried in the graves in the village around 1937-1938.

In late 1989, local officials recognized the findings in Irkutsk and a memorial was commissioned. Today, the memorial stands incomplete and in dilapidated condition due to lack of financing.

Bullfighting ruled illegal in Catalonia, Spain

By CHOWA CHOO & JACK PHILLIPS
Epoch Times Staff

Lethal bullfighting was banned in the Spanish autonomous region of Catalonia by a parliamentary vote of 68 to 55 on Wednesday, following a debate among animal rights activists and Spain's culture.

The coastal state Catalonia, whose capital is Barcelona, became the first mainland Spanish state to place a ban on the centuries-old spectacle. The Canary Islands enforced a ban in 1991.

The new law, which goes into effect January 2011, outlaws the bloodiest version of the sport in which the bull is tormented and ultimately killed. The ban does not include bullfights that do not result in the bull's demise, according to an announcement from the Catalan Parliament.

PROU, a coalition of animal protection activists, spearheaded the ILP (Initiative Legislative Popular) campaign to abolish bullfighting. They mobilized over 1,000 activists to help collect more than 180,000 signatures, says their press release.

“It is not a matter of whimsical prohibitions or of stomping on people's individual freedoms. It is a matter of



French Matador Sebastian Castella is gored by a jandilla fighting bull during a bullfight at the San Fermin festival on July 14 in Pamplona. The festival is a symbol of Spanish culture, despite heavy condemnation from animal rights groups.

PEDRO ARMESTRE/GETTY IMAGES

suffering,” said the statement.

At a celebratory press conference following the vote, a PROU representative said the group was satisfied with

the fruits of their labour.

The summary positions in the long drawn-out debate over banning the bullfight boil down to the abolitionists

arguing that Catalan society must progress and discard its inhumane practice. While conformists said that the sport that dates back to the eighth century should stay as it is, an icon of Spain, others turned the issue political saying that Catalonia should not follow other Spanish states, the majority of which are against bullfighting.

Bullfighting had already become less popular in the region over the past several years.

Councils in 45 towns and cities in Catalonia have passed declarations opposing bullfighting. And a Gallup poll from 2007 revealed that only 7 percent of Spaniards are “very keen” on bullfighting.

The number of bulls killed in official bullfights in Spain in 2006 was 11,458, according to statistics from the Spanish Ministry of Interior, reports the organization Bullfighting-free Europe. The organization says, however, that it believes the number is closer to 40,000 bulls since many are killed in mobile bullrings and during training.

Bullfighting has been banned in cities in Ecuador, Venezuela, France, Portugal, and Colombia, according to the World Society for the Protection of Animals. Today, nine countries in the world still allow bullfighting.

Complexity of Europe grows along with its population

By KREMENA KRUMOVA
Epoch Times Staff

The population of the European Union has reached 500 million people—more than the United States, Canada, and Mexico combined. According to a recent study, the EU is growing due to a combination of migration and natural population growth.

Dr. Sergei Scherbov, lead researcher of the joint study between the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis and the Vienna Institute of Demography, says about 1 to 1.5 million people are moving to the EU every year. The bulk comes from countries such as Turkey, Eastern Europe, Africa, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Caribbean.

“If there was no migration there would be no growth,” Scherbov says.

However, Scherbov adds that migration in the EU over the last year has been stagnant due to the economic crisis. He expects that as the economy stabilizes, many immigrants will return to their countries, something that has already started to happen.

Immigration adds to the diversity and complexity of the Old Continent. While the EU is considered a collective unit, the fact is the political alliance is far from a monolithic block.

For 50 years during the Cold War, many current EU countries were on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain, with the NATO alliance in the West and the Warsaw Pact countries under communist rule in the East.

This division crumbled in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the new epoch truly began in 1993 with the establishment of the EU.

Today, the EU is comprised of 27 countries, with even more cultures, and 23 official languages. As the union enlarges and membership grows, the number of countries, languages, and of course complexities will increase as well.

LIVING LONGER

In addition to migration, Scherbov cites high fertility rates and longer life expectancies as other important factors in the EU's expansion.

“In some European countries like the U.K., France, and Sweden, the fertility rate is pretty high these days, much higher than it is in China. It is not only due to immigrants, but also a very strong social policy which allows women to combine childbearing with being active in the labour force,” he says.

There is a demographic theory, he adds, that in countries where men share responsibility with women for child-raising and taking care of the family, fertility is expected to rise. This theory plays out in Scandinavian countries where there is greater gender equality.

In terms of demography, European countries can be divided by life expectancy. Scherbov says there is a clear distinction between Western Europe and Eastern Europe.

“Eastern European countries have much lower life expectancy than in Western Europe. For example in Russia, for males it is 61.5 years, for females 74.2 years. For females in France the life duration is almost 85; for males in Iceland the life

expectancy is about 80.

“In Russia, for example, people are poisoned by drinking alcohol, there is a lot of stress, and environmental factors. It is similar in Ukraine and former Soviet countries. In Western European countries people have a very different attitude toward life.”

Claims that Europe has an aging population are no longer true, Scherbov says. According to the study aging is slowing, with a progressive increase of life expectancy. The term “old” is changing its meaning, too.

“Our assumptions are that life expectancy will grow by two years per decade. This has been a historical

In terms of demography, European countries can be divided by life expectancy. Scherbov says there is a clear distinction between Western Europe and Eastern Europe.

trend for the last 60 years, especially in Western European countries.”

The scientist notes that 30 years ago few people would live past 65,

but now 95 percent of people survive to this age—which provides a very good reason for governments to ponder an increase in the age of retirement.

This is one of the tools some EU countries are using to help engineer an exit from the economic crisis. France is set to raise the age of retirement from 60 to 62, Germany bumped up it from 65 to 67, and Greece is being pressured to do the same.

Scherbov's research predicts that by 2030, the EU's population will top 528 million.

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