



---[Tombstone] by Yang Jishen, won the Hayek Prize of 2013.

Authenticity of History in Danger in Communist China

Mr. Yang Jishen, a graduate of Tsinghua University, majored in Tractor Manufacturing but turned out later - due to his destiny - to be a journalist. Many of his classmates are the current communist officials. During his career as a journalist with Xinhua News Agency, he earned the reputation of an outstanding journalist by many of his famous reports, and his latest document 'Tombstone' won him 'The Hayek Prize of 2013'. However, according to Yang, only 1/3 of his writings, which were produced in his later years, complied with his conscience.

Yang's 'China's Reform Era Political Struggle' was released in Dec. 2004 and was the last book that Zhao Ziyang, the third Premier of the People's Republic of China read before he passed away. Yang said that Zhao's comment on the book was, "this is an important book, much of the analysis I agree with, the narrative of the book is just and the records of the interviews are accurate". He added, "I'm worrying for the safety of the author."

Yang and his wife, who was a retired assistant-chief engineer of the Tianjin Urban Planning Bureau, had a son and a daughter. Their daughter returned to China after she obtained her degree in Canada, and their son-in-law is a lawyer in Beijing. Their son graduated as a Ph.D. from Tsinghua University and engaged in the IT industry and returned to China after working for a period of time overseas. Before Yang's 'China's Reform Era Political Struggle' was released, Yang called his son and son-in-law and told them: "I finished writing a book for which I might be put in jail, however, it's not a shame for me to be jailed merely because of this book,

because firstly, I wasn't a corrupt official, secondly, what happened to me will not influence your future any more than before." However, he still asked them to prepare for the worst.

Nothing happened for a long period of time after the book was published; then one day, he received a call from the retired cadres' office of the Xinhua News Agency and was invited to attend to their office, where he was told that the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) attached great importance to three issues that happened in the past. The first one was that the former vice president of Xinhua Newsagency, Li Pu, made a speech to the outside world without the permission of the Propaganda Department of the Central committee; another one about the former vice-president of the Xinhua News Agency who was in his 80's and wrote an article criticising the way that the authority handled the funeral of Zhao Ziyang, saying 'it was inappropriate'; the third issue is the book you wrote, 'China's Reform Era Political Struggle'.

They also assured him that the leaders of Xinhua News Agency promised the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee that they were going to solve the problem via their process of advanced education meetings, and as the two vice-presidents were very old they decided to ignore them. But they asked Yang to do some explanation on his intention of writing the 'China's Reform Era Political Struggle' in the advanced education meetings of Xinhua News Agency.

Yang agreed. He introduced the summary of 'China's Reform Era Political Struggle', to the meeting. He told the audience his reason to write the book was that he thought, as a communist member who had more than 40 years membership, and a journalist of long standing, he should be loyal to the party. He was driven by his sense of responsibility to do his research, and once he finished researching this part of history, it came to be impossible for him not to write it down. Then he said, "What I did meets the requirement of advanced education, as what we want to advance is to resume the pursuit of our ideal, to be critical towards all those forces that hinder the reform of our country, etc."

He said in the meeting: " I didn't know why I was criticized by the official of the CCP, however, I did reflect and realized that: 1) I didn't expect this book would be so famous, that it would frighten some VIP's and I offer my apologies to them; 2) the book must have been published too early, if it were published ten years later, the effect might have been better ; 3) there are some misspellings in the book, even the names of some important people in the book are wrong , I should be more careful when the book is republished."

Yang said that several days later he got a reply from the Retired People's Office, and was told that the Xinhua News Agency was going to make a report on his self-criticism which they read as: "1) the book was published too early; 2) the place of the publication was wrong; 3) there were some misspellings and inaccuracies in the book." Upon hearing this, Yang pointed out, " I didn't realise the place of publication was wrong, because the book was published in Hong-Kong which has been returned to China a long time before, so please get rid of this item." But they replied, "Please don't take it too serious, Mr. Yang."

Yang said that later he asked one of his classmates, who worked in Zhongnanhai, what was

being said about the book? His classmate told him that when several higher officials of the CCP were talking about his book, one of them said that there was nothing wrong with the book as it is the truth. However, Hu Jintao said, "we should still consider the time and place of the publication of the book." It was said that someone criticised the book to Hu Jintao, so Hu Jintao was forced to make this comment.

However, one high official of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee later defined the book as "leaking the secret of China by echoing the ideology of the western world."

Yang actually divided his career as journalist of Xinhua News Agency into three periods of ten years each. In the first ten years, 1968 - 1978, he was proud of being able to publish his articles as primary articles of the People's daily, and he had 12 such primary articles in one year, but now he felt that most of the articles of these ten years were useless or even harmful, except two reports, i.e. 'Tajjian Garrison intensively taking up houses, seriously affecting the civil, military relations' and 'Tianjian labour productive survey', which stood the test of time of which he was proud off .

He felt the second ten years were completely fruitless. With the fetters of many interests, such as promotion, he admitted that it was impossible for him to be independent and he completely refused the direction of the CCP. He said that only during the last ten years was he able to write independently and write something complying with the conscience of a journalist.

Yang sighed in the end: " If the people in power in a country are not only the centre of the power; but are also trying to manipulate the information that the people are able to get; to be the centre of information; and also have the right to make the decision of right and wrong for its people; to be the centre of the truth; then that country and its people are in danger."

"History should not be controlled by the people in power to conquer the world", he added, "and we as journalists are the people who should be responsible for the authenticity of history."