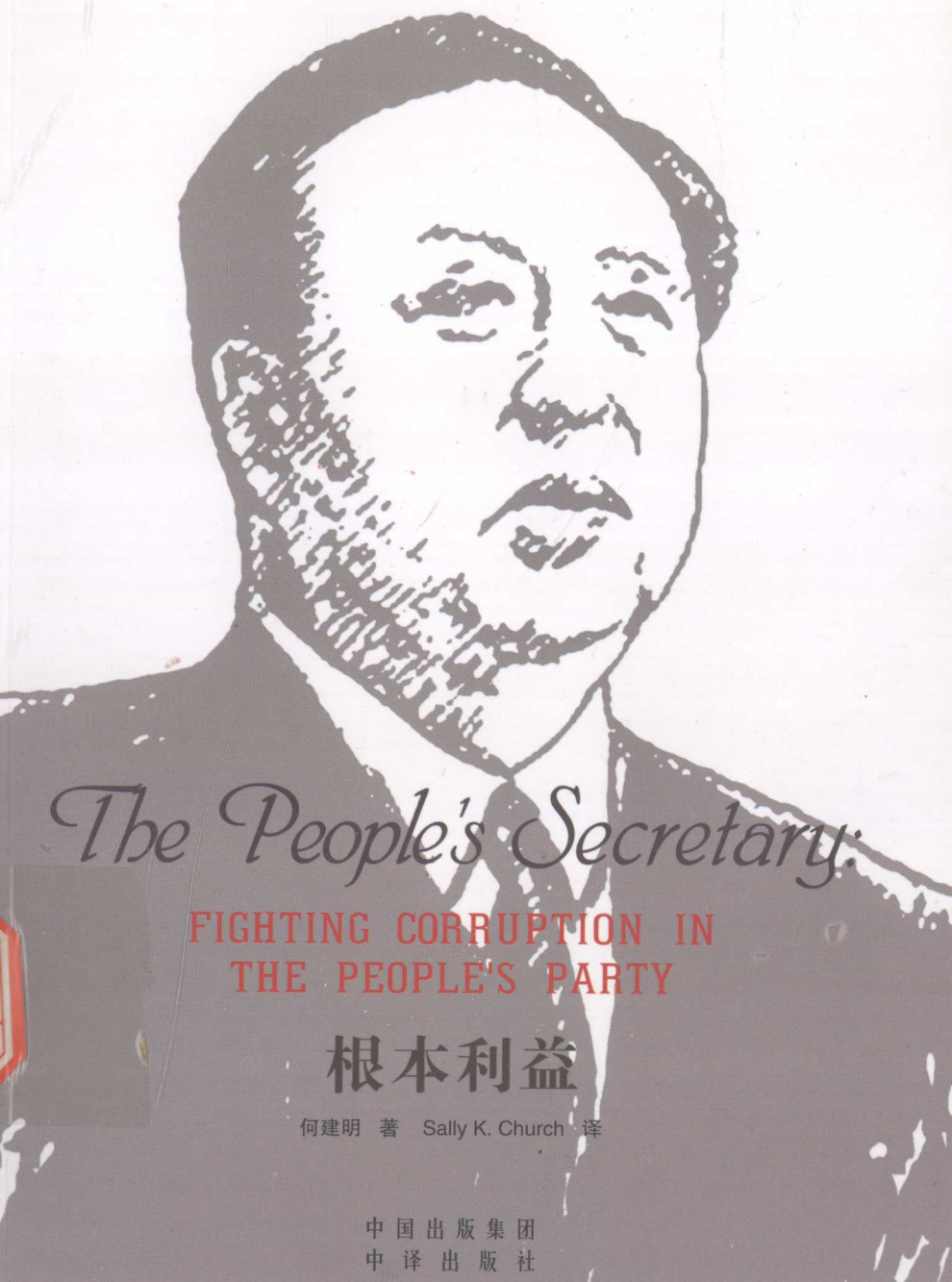


FROM INSIDE CHINA

· 中国报告系列 ·



The People's Secretary:

FIGHTING CORRUPTION IN
THE PEOPLE'S PARTY

根本利益

何建明 著 Sally K. Church 译

中国出版集团
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Prologue

IT WAS THE MAY 1st holiday in 2002, and people were leaving the city with large and small packs on their backs, gleefully and energetically setting off for a day of sightseeing and picnicking. On that day the protagonist of this book, Liang Yurun, Vice Secretary of the Commission for Discipline Inspection (CDI) of the Chinese Communist Party in the city of Yuncheng, Shanxi province, told me that he had to go and deal with an unusual case. "This case cannot be put off any longer", he said. "Every time I put it off for even one day, I become completely distraught." The term "distraught" expressed both his anxiety and his indignation.

As for the "unusual case" he was talking about, he had told me about it on my first trip to Yuncheng. At that time I had the impression that this case was like a great chasm stretching across this model Discipline Inspection official's path, an obstacle that would be very difficult for him to overcome. For the sake of his reputation, I hinted to him, "Even without becoming involved in this kind of case you will still be thought of as an outstanding model official. But if you get involved in it and don't handle it well, or if it becomes messy, won't you be in a very awkward position?"

However, Liang Yurun shook his head and with a seriousness that was rare even for him, he said to me: "If I can't manage to handle a case like this, even if my personal prestige as a model official is as high as the Zhongtiao Mountains, it would count for nothing.

Because of this case, we had many heated discussions over whether or not this book about him should be published.

"If you try to compare the traumatic experiences that Chang Chunying and her family have been through over the past ten years to our jobs as Chinese Communist cadres, the main questions that preoccupy us — whether or how we can achieve promotions to higher positions — are not very important, nor are these issues that have anything in common with this case. I'm not kidding you, Mr He," said Liang Yurun, "I have thought about it long and hard. If something occurs like what happened to Chang Chunying's family, and if it comes into my hands and I still cannot solve it, I might as well go home, follow in my father's footsteps and grow apples in an apple orchard. Compared to the grievances suffered by common people like Chang Chunying, whether we end up being officials or get promoted seems wholly insignificant. If I, as an official, can solve problems as difficult as those of Chang Chunying and her family, my position as an official has not been wasted." Liang Yurun became agitated while uttering these words.

When I thought about what a promising future he deserved to have, I broke out in a cold sweat from worrying about him. For the first few months after receiving the invitation from the Chinese Communist Party's Central CDI to interview Liang Yurun, I was worried about how he was going to handle the case of Chang Chunying, and how the whole matter would progress.

This was an exceptionally difficult case to handle because it

was beyond our wildest imagination of what is possible in this world — the son of a peasant couple, once so full of life, he had been viciously killed. In order to seek a fair legal judgment on the case, the parents put their son's dead body in a coffin and placed it in their house, without burying it, and kept it there for thirteen years. The poverty-stricken couple went to every government department they could think of, presenting their case to anyone they could find. During that time, the husband cracked under the strain of his grief, combined with the soul-destroying hard work of travelling to government offices and making petitions, and the economic burden of it all. He became ill, and eventually collapsed from overwork and died in middle age. The woman in the family, who was both mother and wife, in her infinite grief and indignation, put her husband's body into a coffin and placed it at the head of her bed, again without burying it. Later, having lost all her family's livelihood, she wiped away her tears and went out to resume the long process begun by her husband of petitioning to higher authorities against the injustices that were done to her and her family.

Liang Yurun's first meeting with this peasant woman, Chang Chunying, was in the Office of Letters and Calls in the Municipal CDI at Yuncheng. This is where public complaints are reported and handled.

At that time, Liang Yurun was about ready to go to work, when someone at the CDI quickly ran over to him saying: "There is a peasant woman in the Office of Letters and Calls holding a placard saying 'Injustice! Injustice! Injustice!'" and asking to see you, Secretary Liang."

"Why does she insist on seeing me?" Liang asked casually.

"We in Yuncheng all know that you are the one who helps people

take care of things. You are 'the People's Secretary'!"

"Don't flatter me!" Liang Yurun and the colleagues in the office made a joke of it, while quickly diverting their path from the direction in which they were originally heading (to their offices in the big building) towards the Office of Letters and Calls.

When he entered the Office of Letters and Calls, he saw at a glance the elderly peasant woman sitting there on the sofa.

"Madam, you see," said the Office of Letters and Calls attendant said to the peasant woman. "Secretary Liang has come. You can speak to him now". As soon as she heard these words, Chang Chunying's whole body shook with a jerk, as if she had received an electric shock. She lifted her head, and as she looked, with a dull look in her eyes, at Liang Yurun standing there, her tears suddenly gushed like rain.

"Are you Secretary . . . Liang?"

"Yes that's right, Madam, I am Liang Yurun." When he looked closely at her face, Liang Yurun suddenly shivered. Her face revealed the trauma she had been through. From his professional experience, Liang Yurun knew that this old woman, whose face had a dull, careworn expression, and whose head was covered with unkempt white hair, harboured a grievance that was inexpressibly deep.

"Madam, please come and sit next to me. Take your time and tell me what's wrong. Calm down and we'll find a way to help you to solve your problem." Liang Yurun got up and helped Chang Chunying to a seat next to his own, asking her in a very soft voice, "Madam, what is your 'esteemed longevity' this year?"

"Who me? My 'esteemed longevity'?" the old woman repeated the words to herself self-consciously, looking at Liang Yurun, as

well as the other people in the room.

One of the others said, "Secretary Liang is asking you how old you are."

Chang Chunying finally understood what he meant. She extended her right hand toward him, and then her left hand, and then showed him four fingers on her left hand.

"You are only 59?" Liang Yurun was taken aback. He turned his head, using his eyes to inquire of the other comrades in the Office of Letters and Calls whether this could be true.

"She is two years younger than I am! I was born in January 1942." An older bystander heaved a long sigh and said, "She must have had a hard life, and suffered tremendous anxiety and grief to look so old at this age".

"Madam, please tell us what's bothering you. I will do my utmost to take care of your problem." Liang Yurun suddenly became agitated.

"Secretary Liang . . ." She suddenly collapsed down with a thump onto her knees in front of Liang Yurun, and with a desperate heartrending sound, went unconscious . . .

"Hurry! Help her up!" Liang Yurun was shocked, and immediately called to his colleagues: "Hurry! Call a doctor to come and save her!"

"Hurry, hurry . . ." The people in the Office of Letters and Calls spontaneously formed a circle around her. Just when everyone was rushing around chaotically, Chang Chunying suddenly came to her senses again. She immediately grabbed Liang Yurun's hand tightly and wouldn't let go. She couldn't utter a word from her trembling mouth, and just cried. She cried a big pool of water, which fell onto Liang Yurun's hand and made him feel a coldness that penetrated

into his heart . . .

Chang Chunying was a peasant from Hujiabao village in the town of Xiaoliang, Hejin city, Yuncheng. Her son Yao Chengxiao had been a veteran soldier. One day in 1989, Yao Chengxiao was riding his bicycle home. On the road in the village he crashed into two young men, both sons of a village Party Secretary. The road was not wide enough, and the two young men accused Yao Chengxiao of running into them with his bicycle. Then the three of them quarrelled over it. It started out as just a small, insignificant spat. However, serious family disputes had been rampant in this village ever since the Cultural Revolution and the people of the village were hostile to anyone who did not share their goals, or were from a different clan. People with such differences avoided each other, having no contact with each other even when it came to paying respects to the dead, or giving way to each other on the road. When Chang Chunying's son Yao Chengxiao ran into these two sons of the Secretary, his opponents naturally wouldn't let the matter go, particularly as their father was the head of the village. They began to gang up on Yao Chengxiao, who was outnumbered. Yao did not think that either he or his bike had even brushed his opponents' clothes, so he couldn't see how they could come to blows over this. One side fought to save face and the other was not to be outdone, so he fought back, and the fighting went on. After several rounds they attacked Yao, one from the front and the other from behind, one from above and the other from below. Taking advantage of a moment when Yao was off guard, they stabbed him twice with a knife. Yao fell over in a pool of blood. Later, he was seen by passers-by in the village, who took him quickly to the hospital. However, he had lost so much blood that he stopped

breathing along the way . . .

Such a good son, upon whom the whole family had depended, a pillar of strength who could support the family, was snuffed out so tragically in a moment. His mother Chang Yingchun and father Yao Zhizhong were so grief-stricken that they didn't want to go on living. What made them even more upset and angry was that the two sons of the village Party Secretary, who had willfully murdered the boy, were only charged with intentional bodily harm leading to death. The main culprit was sentenced to only twelve years, and the accessory to only three years.

Given the principle that people who commit murder should pay with their life, this did not make sense to the peasant Chang Chunying and her husband. They felt that their son had died a cruel death and that a great grievance had been committed. They viewed the sentence of the court as too light, and didn't accept it. In order for their son, who had been so cruelly murdered, eventually to close his eyes and be at peace in the realm of shades, they didn't bury him, but instead put his coffin in the room where he had lived. Their goal in doing this was to convince the court to make a more appropriate judgment. To this end, the peasant couple began going to the local authorities to express their grievances. They went to Yuncheng, Taiyuan and four times to Beijing to submit their grievances to higher authorities. They even became a familiar sight to the policemen at the Tian'anmen police station.

You see, when Chang Chunying and her husband went to Beijing for the first time, they didn't know how to express their grievances to the government. Arriving at Xinhua Gate, they saw a People's Liberation Army soldier standing guard at the sentry post at Zhongnanhai [the central headquarters for the Communist

Party and the State Council of the People's Republic of China] and not letting anyone inside. So they took out their mourning clothes and put them on, and then their mourning caps, and knelt down at the entrance to Xinhua Gate. Before they had time to utter more than a few cries, however, they were taken to the police station by a plain-clothes policeman. After the police learned the details of the case, they did not treat them badly. They just explained to them that Beijing is the national capital, that Zhongnanhai is the headquarters of the leaders of the central government, and that if they wanted to solve their problem they needed to go step by step through the correct channels. Later on, someone from Shanxi province came and took them back to their home village.

If a person dies and is not buried right away, the body will very quickly start to decay and produce a bad odor. Moreover, the neighbours and people in surrounding areas will find it hard to bear if the body is not eventually buried, even without believing in ghosts. Especially when summer comes, the foul smell coming from the coffin pervades the air for miles around the area, and people are able to smell it. From that time onward, the Yao family became social outcasts. Their house became known as a "home for dead bodies", and no one would visit them. In the daytime the children would make a wide circle around the Yao family house on their way to school. In the evening, even the adults wouldn't dare go out of their houses to visit family or friends, afraid that a ghost might come out of the coffin and shout its grievances at them. Chang Chunying and her husband, devastated from the loss of their son and isolated from the rest of society, became more and more mournful. Every day when it got dark and the village became quiet, they cried and wailed in front of their son's coffin,