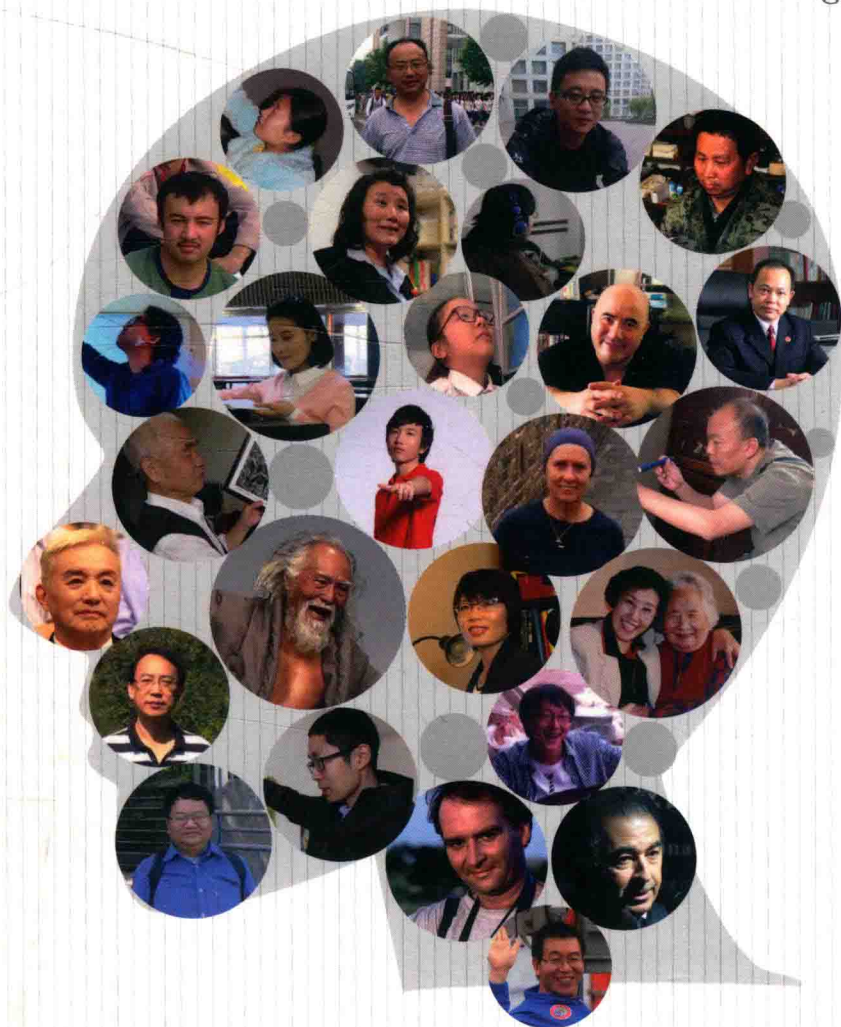


The Chinese Dream Series

UNUSUAL LIVES

28 PEOPLE'S EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Global Times



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U n u s u a l L i v e s

I. Society



1.

Zhou Xiaoping Courts Controversy, Limelight with Patriotic Writings

By Huang Jingjing



Zhou Xiaoping
during an interview
with the *Global
Times* on October 20,
2014, in Beijing
Photo: Huang
Jingjing/GT

The controversially patriotic online writer Zhou Xiaoping was put in the limelight after appearing at a recent symposium on literature and art chaired by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who encouraged Zhou to “spread more positive energy” when he shook hands with him.

However, in cyberspace, as well as in gaining a positive reputation, Zhou has become a target of verbal abuse, criticism and sarcasm because of his articles, which are widely considered as “singing the praises” of the government and “flattering” the Communist Party of China (CPC).

But in Zhou’s eyes, he has never tried to glorify the government and has just sought to refute rumors and misunderstandings about the government with facts. “Patriotism doesn’t conflict with criticism, and I have never opposed being critical of the government. But contradictions do occur when it turns to insults, smears and abuse, which I cannot tolerate and have to strike back against,” argued Zhou.

Thin and small, dressed all in black and wearing a pair of thick glasses, Zhou, 33, sat down for an interview with the *Global Times* in a coffee shop on October 20, 2014, in Beijing.

Apart from his Huawei smartphone, everything else he had was a foreign brand, including his Kailas jacket and La Sportiva hiking boots. “I don’t think using foreign products is necessarily unpatriotic. Doing your own business well and having fewer complaints, that’s what is patriotic in my opinion,” he said.

He has grown accustomed to being verbally attacked for

being a firm defender of the Party, even though he is not a member himself. “I didn’t join the CPC, not because I dislike it, but because I’d rather be a guardian and spectator of its rise outside the system,” he said.

Scholars’ Target

In his articles, Zhou expounded on the achievements of the CPC in poverty alleviation and economic development, argued about major concerns such as food safety, property demolition and high-speed rail, and examined problems in the systems of Western countries such as the US.

While some readers applauded Zhou for boosting national pride, some liberal Chinese celebrities and scholars pointed out factual mistakes, errors of logic and poor reasoning in his writing, slamming him for being a “fake” patriot.

In a blog post written on Tuesday, science critic Fang Zhouzi accused Zhou of “talking rubbish” and listed 13 “mistakes” in one of his articles written in September 2014, *Dream Shattered in the United States*.

In the article, Zhou listed a dozen defects in the US, including high taxes and expenses coupled with low wages and poor guarantees under a “greedy” and “oppressive” system.

However, citing data, Fang said the wages are not as low, nor are living costs as high as Zhou claimed.

Zhou admitted to making some errors in his writings and noted

that he has now become more cautious when quoting facts and data.

“I haven’t gone abroad, but I have many overseas friends who usually share their experiences with me,” he said, adding that he has a WeChat group of more than 200 overseas supporters.

Some commentators have criticized Zhou for continually highlighting citizens’ obligations but downplaying the lack of civil rights, as well as what they perceive as a tendency to attribute all criticisms and complaints against the government to the US conspiracy to exacerbate conflicts and undermine China.

Zhou disagrees. “I never said the government was flawless nor that Western countries were good for nothing,” he said, noting that China has gained advanced technology and valuable experience from foreign countries.

In addition, he complained about the country’s strict controls on the culture industry and clumsy official attempts to push patriotism.

However, his complaints toward and criticisms of the government rarely appear in his articles, as he actively participates in heated debates in defense of the government.

Change of Heart

Now a founder and manager of a new publishing company in Beijing, he says he will spend more time on his main job in the future.

“Writing has been a hobby,” he said. “And I used to complain

about the government a lot.”

Zhou was born in Rongxian County in Southwest China’s Sichuan Province. Both parents were on government payrolls; his father was an oil drill worker and his mother a Sichuan Opera performer. The family could only offer him 6,000 yuan (\$980) when he graduated from high school at the age of 17.

To save money, he said he gave up the opportunity to go to college, instead opting to join the army, becoming a soldier in southern Tibet, where he repaired tanks. By chance, he learned about a book club and ended up spending his entire salary on book subscriptions.

“I read books on everything from economics to computers, and became fascinated with the Internet,” Zhou recalled. After his two-year service ended, he returned home and started working in the county’s cultural bureau.

Bored of his job, which involved inspecting Internet bars and preparing tea for cadres, he quit and went to Beijing, where he found a job with Sohu’s online game department in 2003. That was when he became active on online forums, criticizing the national system.

In 2006, he resigned from Sohu and set up his own business. He went on to found three other companies, an original music platform, an online game website and a design agency.

“Since being a boss, I learned more about the difficulties involved in management. In addition to reading many historical and political books, I began to reflect and get closer to the facts,”

he said. Then, he changed his stance and began to try to expose lies told against the government.

Some also accused him of praising the authorities in order to win benefits for his business. One document circulated on the Internet purported to contain details of an investment negotiation meeting held between Zhou and several government officials in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, in August 2014.

Zhou said he was just one of many who were invited by the Chengdu government, which was looking to attract companies to the city's cultural industrial park.

"In the end, I decided to stay in Beijing," he said. "But even if I had received favorable resources from the government due to being patriotic, I don't think there would have been anything wrong with that."

The rumors and sarcasm directed his way continue, but he says he doesn't care. "I feel content that my writings have already inspired some readers," he said. "The road is always winding toward a bright future."

Villager Wins Fame for Portrayal of Anti-corruption Drive

By Huang Jingjing



An electrical appliance engineer in a village of Central China's Hubei Province recently won overnight fame after his latest anticorruption painting was published by several leading Chinese media.

Amateur artist Qu Wanrong works on a painting in his electric appliance repair shop. Photo: Courtesy of Liu Fei



Qu repairs a television in his shop.
Photo: Courtesy of Liu Fei

Qu Wanrong, 56, from Zhangjiakou Village, Huanghua township, Yichang, is an amateur painter who dedicates his spare time to his pictures. He had been a carpenter for nine years before opening a household appliances repair shop in the village 27 years ago. In 2004, he started to teach himself to draw.

His village lies at the entrance to the Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydropower station. Although the traffic on the road in front of Qu's shop has become heavy since the project was completed in 2006, his business is on the decline.

These days, though, the number of people visiting his shop has suddenly increased, with neighbors, strangers, teachers and farmers, old and young, all coming to see him. But they don't come to have

their appliances fixed. Instead, they are eager to have a look at a 2-meter-wide and 1.5-meter-tall oil painting.

Hanging on the wall of the shop, filled with a variety of electrical components, the picture shows tigers and flies under a giant hammer, depicting the central government's ongoing crackdown on both high and low-ranking corrupt officials.

"Some drove down specially to see the picture. They feel happy that it expresses their support for the fight against corruption," Qu said. "I'm proud to represent ordinary farmers."

Eye on the News

Qu cares a great deal about State and world affairs. Since the new leadership took office in 2013, China has launched an unprecedented crackdown on corruption, which has toppled a number of high-profile officials. In February 2015, on hearing that more corrupt officials fleeing overseas were being arrested and brought back, Qu felt that he had to do something with his paintbrush.

One night, he started to draw. "The anti-corruption campaign targeting both 'tigers' and low-level 'flies' launched by President Xi Jinping is inspiring. Ordinary people like me are very excited, and we should make it hard for corrupt officials to escape even if they have wings," Qu said.

The hammer in his painting is made up of several law books. On the biggest is written "Chinese Constitution." In addition to three tigers with human faces and a fat fly, Qu has also drawn