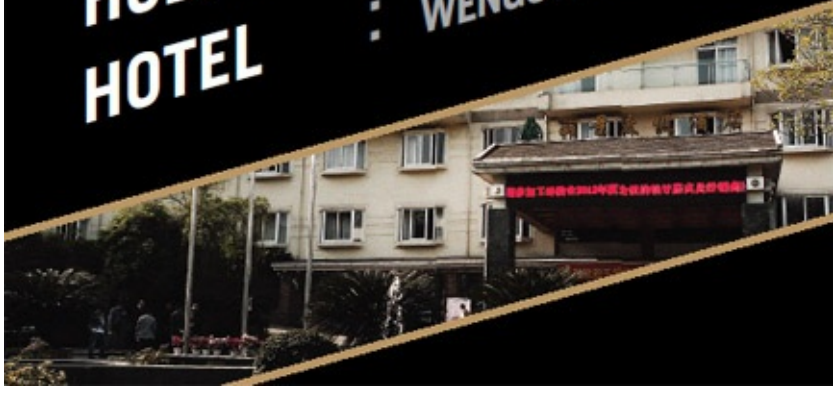


**A DEATH
IN THE
LUCKY
HOLIDAY
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**MURDER, MONEY,
AND AN EPIC
POWER STRUGGLE
IN CHINA**



**PIN HO AND
WENGUANG HUANG**



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CONTENTS

Authors' Note

Cast of Characters

Prologue

PART I: The Fate of a *Kuli*

The Stranger's Phone Call

The Unexpected Visitor

“The Iron Blooded Police Spirit”

“Professor Wang Lijun”

The Slap in the Face

US Consulate Under Siege

“Inviting the Gentleman to the Urn”

PART II: The Princlings

Sitting Tight on the Fishing Boat

“Hello, Dear, It's Your Wife Calling”

The Red Concentration Camp

The Princlings

“The City of Double Happiness”

The Final Push

The Dismissal

Like Father, Like Son

Secret Investigation

PART III: Poisonous Water

The Girl Butcher

A Death at the Lucky Holiday Hotel

The Non-Trial of the Century

Legal Experts Ask: Did Gu Kailai Kill Neil Heywood?

An Insidious Man

From China with Love

Poisonous Water

PART IV: The Victor Is King and the Loser a Bandit

The Resilient Loser: China's Security Czar

The Billionaire Loser: Bo Xilai's Secret Wallet

The Unexpected Loser: “People's Premier” or the “King of Showbiz”?

Hu Is a Loser: The President and his Chief of Staff

The Ultimate Loser: “We’ll Never Allow him to Walk Out Alive”

The Backstage Winner: Long Live the King Father

The Winner Is . . . “Hail to the New Chief”

Index

AUTHORS' NOTE

This book represents the joint efforts of Ho Pin and Wenguang Huang, who have teamed up to relate a tale of scandal, intrigue, and murder in Chongqing—a tale that has had profound repercussions on China and the world. For the sake of clear and compelling storytelling, however, we have chosen to narrate the story using the voice of Ho Pin—a commentator on Chinese politics, and magazine/book/website publisher who broke the news about several pivotal events in the Bo Xilai scandal and subsequently, as the scandal unraveled, became part of this sprawling story.

We intend this book to be an insider's take on a political murder that set off a dramatic, behind-the-scenes fight for power at the highest echelons. It has incorporated a significant amount of previously unpublished information as well as the views of many insiders who rarely, if ever, talk publicly to the press and the public. To research the book, we interviewed more than fifty current and former Chinese government officials, well-connected businesspeople, veteran political analysts, and independent journalists—all of whom shared their knowledge about the Bo Xilai case and the inner workings of the Communist Party. Many chose to remain anonymous for fear of political reprisal. In addition to these interviews, we followed the daily postings on Weibo—China's version of Twitter—and various articles posted on overseas Chinese language websites that escaped government censorship and unveiled critical information at the peak of the scandal. Later, in order to get an on-the-ground experience of the locale for this political drama, Wenguang Huang, posing as a tourist, took a week-long trip to Chongqing in November 2012 to interview government officials, police officers, and ordinary people on the street. He also visited and photographed the hotel where British businessman Neil Heywood was killed. The fact-checking trip enabled us to get an exact sense of the drama and its impact locally and nationally.

What has emerged from this endeavor, we hope, is the most comprehensive account of the Neil Heywood murder scandal that shocked and riveted the international community in 2012 as well as a stunning and unsettling portrait of the different intertwined interest groups and political factions within the Chinese Communist Party's top decision-making body.

It is not a pretty picture.

Though, when appearing in public, China's leaders present a uniform picture of total solidarity—an all-male group uniformly clad in dark suits, white shirts, and (often) red ties with dyed, jet-black hair—the group is anything but a solid, unified group of wise men presiding over the fate of roughly a fifth of the world's population. There are fierce internal power struggles, pitting one political faction and economic interest group against another, massive amounts of official and non-official corruption, byzantine intrigues, and hardball tactics that stop at nothing. The rules of engagement more closely resemble those of warring mafia families than anything else, with princeling tangling with princeling over turf and territory.

And this time, there are some new ingredients in this Chinese hot-pot. In the past, the Communist Party monopolized the flow of information and political scandals were kept secret. The public didn't learn about events until months, or years, later. However, as more Chinese are becoming fluent in English, and English readers, they use many different means to translate the foreign media reports and transmit them back to China via the Internet.

Realizing that the public craved Chinese news from overseas, and considering Western media outlets to be more reliable sources of information than the state-controlled propaganda machine, the

political and business elite as well as friends and relatives of senior Communist leaders have often used secret means to feed Western journalists and political analysts with “exclusives.” Some had their friends post banned information on Weibo. Thanks to these political insiders, the world was able to receive real-time coverage as the scandal unfolded, enabling the foreign media to create a small fissure in the secret maneuverings of the Communist Party. Many blog postings and overseas media reports were castigated by government as “vicious rumors,” but the majority of them proved to be close to the truth. The government official media, on the contrary, turned out to be the biggest rumormonger of all.

However, the foreign media have also learned a valuable lesson from the Bo Xilai coverage. Knowing the challenges Western media face in obtaining news via regular channels, some political insiders, often with tacit approvals from the Communist leadership, manipulated the international media, leaking information that was a mélange of truth, lies, and pure speculation to advance a specific political agenda. As a consequence, many media outlets, including *Mingjing News* (one of Ho Pin’s Chinese-language news sites), carried stories that subsequently proved to be inaccurate or wrong. For example, based on an insider’s tip, we posted a story that Bo Xilai’s trial would take place in October 2012 in the city of Changsha, but it never panned out. In addition, before Bo Xilai was officially charged, Western reporters, acting on tips from insiders, published lurid allegations against him, suggesting that the Bo Xilai case was a fight between reformists and an extreme and corrupt Maoist. As a consequence, the overseas media played a role, in a way that the state media could never have, in a massive government smear campaign against Bo.

As more sources are becoming available in China, Western media organizations are better able to verify each story to improve accuracy and independence. Since this book was written over a period of six months, we were able to work with Chen Xiaoping, a US-based legal scholar and journalist, to check our sources in China, verify details, incorporate the most up-to-date information, and modify any inaccuracies that had occurred in earlier news reports. Despite these efforts, some errors and misjudgments may remain and we take responsibility for them. We hope that other writers, journalists, and historians who follow in our footsteps will be able to further clarify the historical record.

At the time of this writing (January 2013), Bloomberg and the *New York Times* released a series of investigative reports that shed light on the family finances of senior Chinese leaders. With the aggressive coverage of China, Western media giants such as the Bloomberg, *The Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Economist*, *The Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as Chinese-language media outlets operating outside of China, are directly influencing Chinese politics more than ever before. Their coverage is being filtered back to mainland China, forcing the government to respond and making events more transparent. We expect this will continue in the future. As different factions compete to leak information to the Western media and air the opponent’s dirty laundry, their actions may intensify power struggles in the short-term, but in the long-run will hasten changes within the Communist Party.

Ho Pin and Wen Huang
January 2013

CAST OF CHARACTERS*

Neil Heywood—Former British business consultant in China.

Wang Lulu—Neil Heywood's Chinese wife.

Wang Lijun—Former police chief and deputy mayor of Chongqing.

Guo Weiguo—Former deputy police chief of Chongqing.

Bo Xilai (bo-shee-lai)—Former party chief of Chongqing and a Politburo member.

Bo Yibo—Bo Xilai's father and a revolutionary veteran who was a Politburo member and served as China's vice premier before his death in 2007.

Bo Guagua—Bo Xilai's son, who now resides in the US.

Gu Kailai—Bo Xilai's wife and a former lawyer.

Gu Jingsheng—Gu Kailai's father and a former military general before his death in 2004.

Fan Chengxiu—Gu Kailai's mother and a retired Communist Party official.

Li Danyu—Bo Xilai's ex-wife and an army doctor.

Wen Qiang—Former deputy police chief of Chongqing who was executed on corruption charges in 2010.

Zhou Yongkang—Close ally of Bo Xilai and former member of the Politburo Standing Committee who was dubbed China's security czar.

Xu Ming (sh-yu-ming)—Billionaire businessman in the city of Dalian and close friend of Bo Xilai and Gu Kailai.

Xi Jinping (shee-jeen-ping)—Princeling and current Communist Party general secretary and president of China.

Xi Zhongxun—Xi Jinping's father and a revolutionary veteran who was governor of Guangdong province before his death in 2002.

Hu Jintao—Former Communist Party general secretary (2002–2012) and president of China (2003–2013).

Ling Jihua—Hu Jintao’s former chief of staff and Bo Xilai’s “deep throat” who now heads the United Front Work Department.

Wen Jiabao—Former premier of China (2003–2013).

Jiang Zemin—Former Communist Party general secretary (1989–2002) and president of China (1993–2003).

Li Keqiang—Current premier of China.

* We follow the Chinese tradition by placing family names first.

PROLOGUE

AN ENGLISHMAN'S BODY was found in Room 1605 of the Nanshan Lijing Holiday Hotel, (Lucky Holiday Hotel). Nestled atop the densely-wooded South Mountain, the three-star resort is about eight kilometers from downtown Chongqing. The clear mountain air provides a welcome change from the smog-shrouded, fast-growing municipality of more than 30 million. Its secluded location overlooking the sprawling city that straddles the Yangtze River below makes it a popular venue for weddings, holiday parties, government conferences, and leadership retreats. In the spring and summer the hotel accommodates tourists who visit the nearby botanical garden or worship in the Tusha Temple built around 700 CE.

During the off-season month of November, the hotel compound looks eerily deserted. Inside the empty lobby of the main building, two thick wooden ceiling beams, painted in bright red, tower over a big glass fish tank. It feels like entering a gaudy Chinese restaurant. Two young female attendants staffing the registration desk reluctantly stop their computer games to greet guests who either arrive to check in or inquire about the special winter rates.

The hotel registration shows that a *lao wai*, or foreigner, checked into a private villa suite on November 13, 2011. His name was Neil Heywood. He was forty-one, an Englishman with a British passport and a Beijing address. He was last seen with a middle-age Chinese woman who, before she left the suite, flipped on the door's "Do Not Disturb" sign and told the villa supervisor not to bother the foreign guest because he'd had "too much to drink."

Two days later, the cleaning staff, noticing that the guest in Room 1605 had not stepped out of his room the whole time and suspecting something had gone awry, notified the villa supervisor. On receiving no answer to his knocks and calls, he opened the door and discovered the foreigner dead on his bed. The hotel's general manager contacted the police.

Wang Lijun, the police chief of Chongqing, was the first to show up at the scene with the vice chief of his criminal investigation team, whom government papers identified by his last name, Huang. After getting details from the hotel manager, villa supervisor, and cleaning staff and examining the room, Wang Lijun sent Huang away and assigned the case to four of his trusted senior police officers—his deputy police director, the chief of the criminal investigation section, the chief of technical detection, and the chief of the Shapingba District.

The initial police report shows the investigative team interviewed the hotel staff, took a blood sample from the victim's heart, and conducted a CT scan on the body. The next morning, the team declared that Heywood had experienced "sudden death after drinking alcohol" and reported the results to Wang Lijun, who later testified that he "did not oppose their conclusion." Police located Heywood's family in Beijing—he was married to Wang Lulu, a Chinese national, and had two children. Based on a British report several months later, Heywood's mother in London was grief-stricken after receiving notice of her son's death. Her husband, Heywood's father, had just died of a heart attack at the age of sixty-three after drinks over dinner at their London home.

The Chongqing Public Security Bureau persuaded Heywood's family members to accept its conclusion on the cause of death and, with their approval, cremated Heywood's body. No autopsy was conducted. Heywood's friends said he was "not a serious drinker," but neither the family nor the British Consulate raised any objections to the investigation and its conclusions.

On November 18, three days after Heywood's body was found, the case was closed. With so many foreigners living in China, Heywood's death went largely unnoticed by the media and the public. B

in Chinese mythology, the spirit of the dead does not dissolve if he or she has unfinished business in this world. The ghost lingers, clinging to its enemies, manipulating their minds, and causing havoc in their lives. So it would prove for those who had come into contact with the dead man from Room 1605, including the most elite members of the Chinese Communist Party. The crisis triggered by Heywood's death reveals more about the scandalous state of corruption in China than any dissident or journalist could ever manage.

酷

Ku

吏

Li

The Fate of a *Kuli*

K*uli*, pronounced “cool-lee,” is an ancient term referring to an official or police officer who relied on extreme means of torture and brutality to help his master maintain power.

THE STRANGER'S PHONE CALL

LUNAR NEW YEAR PREDICTIONS are taken seriously in China, if only in the hope that the coming year will be better than the one just passed. At midnight on January 23, 2012, Chinese people around the world ushered in the Year of the Dragon. Though the mythical creature symbolizes strength, power, and good fortune, many were wary of its fiery nature, which heralds volatility and change. “China will have some political surprises,” a newspaper in Hong Kong quoted a fortune-teller as saying. “In the second half of the year, a scandalous corruption case will be exposed in China. A number of high-ranking officials will be forced to step down. Some may be thrown behind bars, even pass away.”

“Political surprises” was a fairly safe bet and was glossed over amid the celebrations in mainland China, where the government-controlled media hyped up the dragon’s auspicious associations, such as “harmony” and “grand takeoff of the Chinese economy.” In private, many in the leadership would have shared the fortuneteller’s foreboding. The 18th Party Congress was scheduled for the fall, when a new generation of thoroughly vetted leaders who had won fierce power struggles would take over. Leadership transitions historically have been times of political intrigue and conspiracy, and during the past two decades a common and effective way to eliminate a challenger or political opponent was to link a rival with a corruption scandal. President Jiang Zemin employed the trick to consolidate his power, as did his successor, President Hu Jintao. In a one-party state such as China, jockeying for influence is a raw reality of the political system. There is nowhere else to go, so all fighting must be infighting. However, nobody, not even the fortune-teller, expected that the first political surprise of the new year would come even before the fifteen-day celebration was completed. And I was an unwitting messenger.

On February 2, I was in Taiwan. While I waited in the lobby of the Grand Hyatt in Taipei for an early morning meeting, my cell phone rang. “Are you the publisher of *Mingjing News*?” asked a low, nervous voice, referring to one of my US-based Chinese-language news sites specializing in exclusive coverage of Chinese politics. When I said yes, the voice whispered, “Please give me a private number. I have something important to share with you.” Intrigue is everywhere in greater China and I encountered similar situations before. I gave the man, who sounded middle-aged, a colleague’s cell phone number. The conversation was brief. The caller identified himself as an official at the Communist Party’s Municipal Committee for Discipline Inspection in Chongqing. The call

disclosed that Wang Lijun, the city's police chief, had just been sacked and was under internal investigation and charged with corruption. I was skeptical. The caller noticed and raised his voice in agitation: "Trust me. It's 10,000 percent correct!"

Wang Lijun had made a name for himself in the city's much-publicized campaign to crack down on corruption and organized crime. He was said to have been seriously wounded more than twenty times fighting gangs, and the local and national media played him up as the "Iron Blooded Police Spirit." More important, he was the right-hand man of Bo Xilai, the party chief of Chongqing and a rising political star.

If Wang was under arrest, it was a significant story. I rescheduled my appointment and contacted my source, a senior official with the Chongqing municipal government, to verify the information. Though the source confirmed that Wang would no longer head the public security bureau, he was not aware of any internal investigation against Wang, adding, "Don't forget, he's still the deputy mayor."

But I knew that even if Wang were allowed to keep the title of deputy mayor, he was obviously on his way out, because the public security department had been the real base of his power.

As a journalist and writer, I have covered Chinese politics for more than twenty-five years, first for the government media in mainland China and subsequently for numerous newspapers in Taiwan and Hong Kong. In the 1990s, I started an overseas independent publishing company, aiming to provide a free forum for writers in and out of China, where such opportunities are not available. Even though the books and magazines I have published remain banned in mainland China, tourists smuggle them in from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Moreover, a large number of Chinese Internet users employ proxy servers to access the content on *Mingjing News*. Over the years, I have received a steady stream of news tips and article submissions from senior officials and their friends—well-connected businesspeople, Chinese journalists, and scholars, all of whom represent different political factions and viewpoints. Some attempt to fight the government propaganda machine by revealing the true stories behind certain political decisions, or exposing corruption scandals within the party and the government out of a sense of justice, whereas others have no such noble intent, aiming to smear their political opponents with a mixture of truth and rumor or to advance certain political agendas. The "deep throats" understand that they can effectively influence public opinions. With the explosion of Internet technology, news in the overseas media is available in China in seconds—despite the government's firewalls.

Based on the anonymous tip and my own research, I dictated the Wang Lijun story to a colleague who posted it on *Mingjing News* at eleven o'clock in the morning China time. In the story, I mentioned Wang could be under investigation for alleged corruption.

I had no idea that the one hundred-word news item, which soon spread across the Internet, would become the prelude to a political drama that contains all the elements of what the Chinese call *chopin*, or Hollywood tent-pole production—raw ambitions, secret succession plots, historical feuds, shifting alliances, murder, espionage, power marriages, and sexual trysts. The cast would include some of the most influential politicians, business moguls, army generals, and TV celebrities, whose formal photographic portraits often appear on the front pages of Chinese and Western newspapers, and the faceless women who supposedly control their men "behind the bamboo curtains." The locales for the drama would include tiny, winding streets in the mountain city of Chongqing and an idyllic seaside resort in the UK. The events that have been unfolding in China since February 2, 2012, are not part of what the director or directors of the movie led us to believe: a battle between the good and evil or a conflict between Maoist radicals and moderate reformists. What we are seeing is political intrigue and power struggle—different cliques competing for the top positions—many driven as much by

personal loyalties and generational ties as they are by ideological differences.

TWO HOURS AFTER my website posted the news of Wang's sacking, press officers at the Chongqing municipal government, which administers some 30 million people, released a short announcement on Weibo, China's equivalent of Twitter and Facebook:

The Chongqing Municipal Party Committee has recently decided that Comrade Wang Lijun will no longer serve as the chief and Party secretary of the Municipal Public Security Bureau. As the deputy mayor, he will be in charge of science research, education and environment.

The "deputy mayor" reference reminded me of an article in the Hong Kong-based *New Century Magazine*, which reported on the staged mayoral election in March 2011 at Chongqing's People's Congress, the equivalent of a state legislature in the US. All the mayoral candidates on the ballot were preselected by the party and delegates merely rubber-stamped every name. Wang's name was on the ballot. Even though the city had just awarded him the "People's Protector" honor, several delegates abstained from voting for Wang. Embarrassed, the head of the Congress annulled the vote and initiated several more rounds of voting until every delegate voted yes; the government media wanted to state Wang had been chosen unanimously.

A year later, the same people who had given him "unanimous" support were plotting his exit. Wang was allowed to remain as deputy mayor, but his responsibilities had shifted from his areas of expertise—public security, national security, judiciary, citizen petitions, and political stabilities—to fields about which he knew nothing. It was the first sure sign that Wang had really done something wrong.

The anonymous caller's tip that Wang might be under investigation for corruption charges sounded credible and did not surprise me or other political analysts overseas. In a country plagued with rampant corruption, no Communist official is immune. In 2009, Wang's predecessor, Wei Qiang, who had held the deputy police chief's position in Chongqing for sixteen years and cracked several of China's high-profile criminal cases, was executed for bribery and ties with organized crime.

However, the Chongqing government seemed to go out of its way to dispel the rumor that Wang Lijun was under such investigation. Soon after the city's short statement was posted, a copy of Wang's "performance evaluation" surfaced on the Internet. In the review, which had been prepared by Chongqing party chief Bo Xilai's office for the mayoral election the year before, the former police chief was characterized as being "politically firm and reliable, principled and possessing a strong sense of responsibility." He was a "tough and impartial" cop who "enjoys a high reputation among the masses." Occasionally, the review said, Wang "displays impatience at work and lacks diplomacy when criticizing others."

On the surface, it seemed Wang's temperament and confrontational style were the cause of his job change and there was no hidden agenda. A Hong Kong newspaper went so far as to cite a source in Chongqing as saying that by assigning him to new areas, his boss, Bo Xilai, hoped Wang could expand his experience and prepare for "bigger things" in the future.

Behind such bland assurances, the Chongqing government was in crisis control mode, trying to downplay Wang's firing. Meanwhile, political insiders in Chongqing and Beijing were busy contacting overseas media via secure mobile channels, churning out completely different stories.

The following day, the same anonymous caller reached me once again, with a "Didn't I tell you it's 10,000 percent true" tone. Self-congratulation was not the only purpose of his call. He wanted

share still more startling revelations. In an encrypted e-mail he sent subsequently, he wrote:

Several business people bribed Wang by buying him houses in Beijing, Dalian and Chongqing. Wang was also implicated in a corruption scandal in the city of Tieling, where he served as police chief for twenty-two years. Three senior police officers, all of whom were Wang's friends, had been convicted of taking bribes and embezzling government construction funds.

In addition, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection charged Wang with colluding with organized crime syndicates to monopolize the sale and production of minerals in early 2000 when he was deputy mayor in the city of Jinzhou. After Wang was transferred to Chongqing, he had awarded profitable contracts to his friends, pocketing thousands of yuan in commissions and depositing the money abroad. For example, a clothing factory tailored uniforms for the public security bureau in Chongqing. Each set cost about two hundred yuan but they were sold at four thousand yuan per set. Lastly, Wang changed the name of the Chongqing Public Security Bureau to "Police Administration" and altered the police uniform design. All of these were done without the approval of the central government. The leadership in Beijing was shocked and outraged. At the moment, several of Wang's business partners and friends, including his driver, are being detained for investigation.

In the face of these corruption allegations, Bo Xilai decided to act fast to distance himself by sacking Wang from the police chief's position.

In retaliation, Wang had sent a thick letter by express mail to the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, accusing Bo and his wife of taking bribes and transferring a large sum of assets abroad.

The allegations were shocking, but some, such as "colluding with organized crime syndicates monopolize the sale and production of minerals," sounded far-fetched and lacked proof. Because I had no time to e-mail or call my contacts to corroborate the details, I put the story aside until I could check the claims.

Two hours later, a colleague in the US informed me of an "exclusive" insider's story on Boxun, a popular user-generated Chinese-language news site in the US. I skimmed through it and realized it was the same story that the anonymous caller had provided to me. The Boxun "exclusive" sparked a slew of reactions in the overseas Chinese media. "The newly released reports about Wang's accusations against Bo and his wife have added elements of uncertainties to Bo Xilai's blatant attempt to join the Politburo Standing Committee at the upcoming party congress," broadcast Voice of America.

The next day, as I was pondering the accuracy of Wang's claims against Bo Xilai, the same persistent caller got ahold of me, expressing his disappointment that I had not yet published the information he had e-mailed. He teased me with more anecdotes:

Wang acted like he had been possessed by an angry ghost. When two officials showed up at Wang's office to inform him that he would no longer be the police chief and urge him to hand over his weapons, Wang was so confrontational that he pulled out his handgun and subsequently smashed his water glass in anger. He threatened to expose the illegal activities of Bo and his wife if anyone dared harm him. Wang even requested a transfer back to Beijing or Liaoning province, claiming that his life was in danger.

Meanwhile, a "princeling"—as children of senior Communist officials are known—e-mailed me through a secure mobile channel from Beijing. He offered a similar version, but with a twist:

Wang became emotional after Bo took away his police chief's position and locked himself up in an office on the fifteenth floor of the Municipal Public Security Bureau building, one level below the department's ammunition warehouse. Worrying that Wang would get out of control and access the warehouse, officials there put him under surveillance. Wang was tipped off. He thought the surveillance [team] was meant to assassinate him.

Boxun and *Mingjing* posted the unverified stories. By then it had become clear to me that some invisible hands were out to destroy not only Wang but also, by association, the Chongqing party chief Bo Xilai, and that the deliberate leaks or rumors could further antagonize Bo and Wang, pushing them to take extreme action against each other.

Bo Xilai had definitely seen the overseas coverage. On February 3, he emerged. At a conference on publicity and culture work, Bo remarked, "Each time something happens in our city, the hostile forces

painstakingly make up stories and spread vicious rumors. Their intent is to cause chaos. This is an invisible battle, but the fight is fierce. . . . We cannot neglect our propaganda front. This is a hard job. Information itself might be soft and invisible, but its results are concrete and hard. We should provide a large amount of healthy and uplifting information to the press. We should focus on our strengths and build our steely stamina.”

Wang resurfaced on February 5. He acted very cooperatively in public, as if he were busy adapting to his new role. A TV clip showed him visiting the Chongqing municipal education department and then the Chongqing Normal University, where he looked poised and listened attentively to reports from the school authorities. When commenting on his new assignment, Wang said with apparent sincerity, “This is a new challenge for me and a great learning opportunity.” Wang and Bo had presented a seemingly unified front, suggesting that the rumors were malicious and that each man would be continuing as normal, although Wang had been assigned new duties. The pretense lasted barely forty-eight hours.

THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR

NO. 4 CONSULATE ROAD is a sprawling white cinder-block building in the southwestern city of Chengdu, reached by a tree-lined street south of the crowded city center. It is the US Consulate where thirty or so American officials handle mostly visa applications and commercial affairs for southwestern China.

Students and residents applying for visas to study and visit the US come to the consulate from Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, and Tibet. In the past, the line for visa interviews would begin forming around midnight, made up mostly of young college graduates. On a normal day, the visa line was up two blocks long by the time the doors opened in the morning. “It looked like every young person with family connections and money wanted to go to America,” a local resident recalled.

Appointments these days are arranged online and via telephone, the line in front of the consulate rarely more than a sizeable gaggle, and the street scene is serene. Even as China gradually emerged as an economic powerhouse, enthusiasm about studying or living in the US never waned. Many young Chinese still see the consulate as holder of the key to an exciting and free life in the home of Microsoft and Apple, Hollywood movies, and multinational investment banks. Others see it as an expression of American imperialism, especially when China and the US spar over human rights and trade issues. On the Google satellite map, beneath the address of the consulate, was a comment in Chinese: “The place looks ominous. People come here to betray their country and surrender to our enemy.”

For ordinary residents, the consulate, guarded by frozen-faced Chinese police, looked mysterious and inaccessible, a place that bore little relevance to their lives. The perception changed on the cold, windy evening of February 7, 2012.

Many commuters found themselves stuck in the area near the US Consulate, which was suddenly cordoned off. Dozens of police cars with flashing lights lined the street. Checkpoints were set up on every cross street. Police directed traffic and yelled at pedestrians who attempted to slip past. Frustrated commuters posted pictures on Weibo trying to figure out what had happened, and people in the city and around the country soon learned about the news.

A person with the alias “Gray Wolf in the Desert” tweeted:

Does anyone know which VIP is visiting the US Consulate? There are about several hundred policemen surrounding the US Consulate—armed police, traffic police, ranger police, you name it.

Another posting stated:

Police are everywhere. I've been waiting in the cold for an hour and can't go home. Lights on the streets have been turned off. Fully armed police are posted around the Friendship Hotel next to the US Consulate. If they are not making a movie, it means something major has happened.

As questions swirled around cyberspace, another Weibo user noticed that the police were towing an SUV that had been parked in front of the consulate. Judging from the license plate number, the car belonged to a government official in the city of Chongqing. By midnight, Wei Jiuru, a lawyer in Beijing, cited a government source as saying, "Wang Lijun, the deputy mayor of Chongqing, has escaped into the US Consulate to seek asylum."

The news quickly circulated, touching off a tidal wave of speculation. A person with the alias of "Koki-Wong" added more details: "Wang Lijun claims that Bo Xilai is out to assassinate him. So he is now hiding inside the US Consulate. At the moment, the US Consulate is under siege. A large number of armed police from Chongqing are there to get Wang Lijun. I think he will evaporate from the world soon!"

By the time offices opened on the morning of February 8, Internet censors had deleted every posting about the incident, but by then everyone knew about Wang's attempted defection.

In a country where the government operates in secrecy and the media serves as the "mouthpiece" of the party, Weibo is tearing down the walls that block the information flow across the country. When anything major happens in China, netizens ignore state TV, radio, and newspapers and look to Weibo for their information. This is especially true for controversial events when regular media outlets are restricted and required to keep quiet and follow official lines. More than 300 million people subscribe to Weibo on Sina, one of China's largest Internet search portals, with daily posts exceeding 100 million. The popularity of Weibo has posed a major problem for Beijing, which finds it difficult to shut down or simply ignore a Weibo site. Oftentimes the government has to respond to reports on Weibo, such as the pressure of posts.

The Chongqing municipal government turned to its Weibo shortly before eleven o'clock on the morning of February 8 and issued a ludicrous one-line comment:

Chongqing deputy mayor and former police chief Wang Lijun, 52, is undergoing "vacation-style treatment" due to his heavy workload and stress.

That merely fueled further speculation and ridicule. In a matter of hours, "vacation-style treatment" became the most popular political buzzword online.

One sarcastic posting stated, "Getting a vacation-style treatment in the US Consulate? Did he defect or seek vacation-style treatment? What a blatant lie, unheard of in Chinese history!"

Realizing the absurdity of its statement, the Chongqing municipal government removed it from its Weibo but reposted it an hour later, then removed it again. To many, it was an indication that local officials had lost direction and did not know what to do.

Wang's defection had caught Beijing off guard. While senior leaders were mulling over a solution, government censors were left without directions. They waited for instructions, unsure what they should be blocking and what could go through; their inaction allowed comments and news leaks to flood the network. Wang Xing, a journalist with China's *Southern Metropolis Daily* newspaper, found out from a contact at the Chengdu Municipal Public Security Bureau that Wang Lijun had left

Chengdu. His newspaper spiked the story, so he posted it on Weibo: “Wang Lijun was taken away [from the US Consulate] this morning in a car provided by the Sichuan Provincial Public Security Department. He then flew to Beijing.” The posting proved to be true.

Western media outlets, such as *Forbes*, *Reuters*, the *New York Times*, and Voice of America contacted the US Embassy in Beijing to verify the details. Richard Buangan, US Embassy spokesman said he was “not in a position to comment regarding reported requests for asylum.” On the night of February 8, under intense media pressure, US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland confirmed in Washington that Wang had requested a meeting with the Chengdu consul two days earlier, then “left of his own volition.” Nuland declined to comment on whether Wang had requested asylum.

The lack of details prompted many of Wang’s supporters to question claims that their patriotic anticrime hero would seek political asylum at the US Consulate. One Weibo posting quoted an insider source as saying Wang was the unwitting victim of a trap by his enemies within the party—in this version of events, the US consul general had invited Wang to go in for an urgent antiterrorism meeting.

On February 9, political insiders bombarded *Mingjing News* and Boxun with details and speculation. Despite years of government control, ordinary people have stopped trusting the state-run media. News from overseas is considered more credible than a report in the *People’s Daily*. Knowing that antifirewall software enables overseas news to filter back to China, different political factions have learned to use overseas Chinese media to influence public opinion and embarrass their opponents by supplying them with inside scoops. Not all of the information I had received was reliable—the reports were many elements of deliberate fabrication—but as the events unfolded in the following months, the majority proved to be true, or at least close to the truth.

On the morning of February 9, an article on Boxun, which quoted an official from Beijing, shed more light on Wang’s “defection”:

On the afternoon of February 6, after attending several activities at a university in Chongqing, Wang Lijun left in disguise and entered the US Consulate in Chengdu to seek political asylum.

Authorities in Chongqing sent troops to the consulate and surrounded the building for twenty-four hours. During his stay, Wang Lijun had long conversations with American intelligence officials and divulged political information relating to power struggles within the Chinese leadership. He also applied for political asylum. Due to pressure from the Chinese government and to the fact that Wang was disturbed and emotionally unstable, American officials turned him over to the Ministry of State Security early in the morning of February 8. At the moment, he is being held for questioning at a secure location in Beijing.

Before leaving the US Consulate, Wang was heard talking to officials of the State Security Ministry: “I’m Bo Xilai’s victim. Bo Xilai is a conspirator. I’m going to fight him until my death. My evidence against him has been transferred overseas.”

Wang’s attempted defection made Bo and his wife, Gu Kailai, very nervous. Gu hasn’t been able to sleep for several days.

When the Boxun story came out, I was still in Taiwan. My skepticism remained: the melodramatic descriptions seemed to have been taken from a bad Hollywood action movie, leaving too many questions unanswered. What prompted a nationally known police chief to seek shelter at the US Consulate? How could the Chinese government ignore international law and send troops to block the US Consulate for twenty-four hours? I could not think of any precedent that would suggest that the series of amazing events described in Boxun was authentic. With poor telephone reception, I felt reluctant to verify a story I suspected had been embellished with many fictional elements.

However, as insider e-mails poured in with similar details about Wang and Bo over the following two days, I became convinced that most of what had been reported was authentic.

On February 12, a letter supposedly written by Wang Lijun on the day after he had been fired appeared on many overseas Chinese news sites.

When everyone sees this letter, I'll either be dead or have lost my freedom. I want to explain to the whole world the reasons behind my actions. In short: I don't want to see the Party's biggest hypocrite Bo Xilai carry on performing: When such evil officials rule the state, it will lead to calamity for China and disaster for our nation. . . . Bo Xilai is a despot who makes arbitrary decisions, hateful and ruthless. If you go along with him you'll prosper, go against him and you'll perish. He always forces his subordinates to use any means possible to do all kinds of unspeakable things on his behalf. If you don't comply you are dealt with ruthlessly. He treats people like chewing gum: after a little chew, he just throws you away, and he doesn't care whose feet you end up under. . . . Bo Xilai has the reputation of being honest and upright, but he is actually corrupt to the core, conniving with his family members getting outrageously rich. I have documented these matters, and have already submitted reports to the relevant parties and I also ask that friends abroad help to circulate this letter to the world. Everybody's got to die, I am willing to use my life to expose Bo Xilai. For the sake of ridding the Chinese system of this scourge on the people, this brazen careerist, I am willing to sacrifice everything!

Zhou Lijun, a scriptwriter who befriended Wang while doing research for a TV series based on the renowned police chief's life in 1999, considered the letter credible because he had heard the chewing gum reference from Wang before. The letter made me realize a political earthquake was rumbling toward the head before the 18th Party Congress. I assembled a news team to monitor the constant flow of new tips from inside China and to cover, after verification, developments relating to Wang.

“THE IRON BLOODED POLICE SPIRIT”

GENETIC SCIENTISTS BELIEVE that 17 million people in Asia are direct descendants of Genghis Khan. Wang Lijun liked to brag at the height of his fame that he is a product of the fearsome thirteenth-century Mongolian warrior.

Born in Arxan, Inner Mongolia, on December 26, 1959, Wang shared the same birthday as another formidable figure, Mao Zedong, who led the Communist revolution to victory in 1949 and ruled China with brutality for twenty-seven years. At the height of Wang's career, a local newspaper in the northeastern city of Tieling described Wang's birth in a style once reserved only for Mao:

When the glowing sun broke through the clouds and rose slowly on the horizon, spewing golden rays, a crying baby boy was born in a house at the foot of the Arxon Mountain. By Mongolian tradition, a newborn's name is based on the specific time and the natural environment of his birth. Wang's father, well versed in Mongolian culture, bestowed upon him a romantic name—“Ünen Bayatar,” which means “A True Hero.” Ünen Bayatar's Chinese name is Wang Lijun, which means “Finding your call in the military.” As a little boy, Wang inherited the heroic styles of his famous ancestor Genghis Khan, and began practicing horse-riding and archery.

Not everyone was prepared to buy into the Mongolian-warrior angle; Wang Licheng, a lawyer and blog writer in China's northeastern province of Liaoning, disputed Wang's ethnicity. Though he was born in Inner Mongolia, the lawyer, who has closely monitored the official's career path over the past decade, claims Wang is 100 percent Han—the largest ethnic group in China. His ancestors lived in the northeastern province of Liaoning. In an application form that Wang submitted to the army in 1977, he listed his ethnicity as Han.

“Why did Wang change his ethnicity from Han to Mongolian?” asked the lawyer in his blog. “At the 14th Communist Party Congress in 1992, Wang Lijun, who was then the deputy police chief in Tieling city, was contending for a delegate spot, which could put him on a fast track to the top. Knowing that the Party always allocated token seats for members of the minority groups, Wang changed his ethnicity to Mongolian.”

Whether Mongolian or Han, Wang was brought up in the Mongolian tradition. As a teenager, he was a member of a Mongolian youth boxing team and commanded superb martial arts skills. After high school in 1977, he was assigned a job at a state farm in northeastern China and a year later joined the army. According to a childhood friend, Wang always dreamed of becoming a military officer. While stationed in Tieling, a northeastern city with a population of 3 million people, he twice took the rigorous national college entrance exam hoping to get into a military academy, but he never passed. In 1982, a year after his compulsory military service ended, Wang married Xiao Shuli, who was a switchboard operator in the army. Four months after their marriage, the two settled in Tieling, where through the connections of his father-in-law, an army officer, Wang obtained a job as a truck driver at the municipal commerce bureau. His wife also left the military and was employed at the local police department.

Wang's police career started in 1983, when the local public security bureau enlisted him as a volunteer in a neighborhood watch group. Wang took the assignment seriously and trained a group of young people who diligently patrolled the streets and coal mining facilities. In 1984, a friend at a local mining company introduced him to the Tieling deputy police chief, who later recommended Wang to join the police force when the Tieling Municipal Public Security Bureau began recruiting in 1985. Despite his lack of a college education, which was required of other candidates, he got the job.

Three years later, at the age of twenty-eight, Wang was promoted to head a police station in Xiaonan township at the southern-most tip of the city, where robberies and gang-related killings were rampant. A month before he assumed the position, a young police officer there was ambushed and stabbed to death. The assailant was never caught. An article in the *Law Weekend* described vividly Wang's first week at his new job there:

Wang received a phone call while he was on duty one night. "Are you the new police chief? Do you know how your predecessor died? You will end up like him. If you don't believe me, come see me at the train station." Wang slammed the phone down, holstered his handgun and headed directly to the train station. In the icy cold wind, he searched for the gang leader and shouted, "If you have the guts, come out to meet me!" Wang waited until dawn, but the gang leader never showed up.

Thus, Wang's reputation as a brave and fearless officer soared. The new police chief was not only brave, but also smart. In his spare time, he invented an automatic alarm system, connecting all public security offices nearby. He had the alarm system installed in factories and government offices. Each time someone broke in, the red lights in the public security bureau would flash. Police could be on site within minutes.

The crime rate plummeted in Wang's district and within three years, the state media said he solved 281 criminal cases and the township was being cited as a model in the province. In 1991, he was transferred to another branch, where he practically lived in the office. Wang created a record by busting ten criminal groups in nine days. In January 1992, he was honored by the Ministry of Public Security as one of "China's Ten Most Remarkable Policemen" and traveled to Beijing to meet many of China's senior leaders. Upon his return, Wang was appointed the deputy director of the Tieling Public Security Bureau and sent to receive training at the Chinese People's Security University. At the beginning of his tenure in Tieling, the city was infested with organized-crime gangs that controlled the city's nightclubs, hair salons, and restaurants, engaging in prostitution and blackmail. Gun shootings were rampant and gang members even planted bombs outside government buildings. In winter, many farmworkers were largely unemployed and engaged in drinking, pickpocketing, and street fighting. Ordinary residents suffered at the hands of mafia leaders and street gangs.

As an important new initiative, Wang launched an anti-organized crime campaign in September 1994. He set up a forty-member work team and turned a three-level office building into a temporary jail, detaining and interrogating suspects. Over the next four days, he cracked more than 800 cases.

arresting 923 people in connection with the 87 gangs, or mafia groups, that controlled the city. A subsequent trials, seven ringleaders received the death penalty. Nineteen police officers were found to be corrupt and were jailed or sacked on charges that they had colluded with criminals.

Many legal experts, including Wang Licheng, the lawyer who disputed Wang's ethnicity, criticized the campaign for denying due process to the accused, but dissenting voices fell on deaf ears. The authorities were pleased with the results and Wang was hailed as a tough crime fighter. The local government commissioned a book, *The Legends of the Northeastern Tiger*, to chronicle his heroic acts. In one chapter, Chen Xiaodoing, the author of the biography, described how Wang captured the two mafia leaders:

On September 19, 1994, Wang was tipped off by an informant that Yang, a local mafia leader, was hiding at a nearby hotel. Wang took a small police squad there and they took up positions in an employee meeting room on the hotel's first floor. The informant went to see Yang, whispering to the mafia head that he had something urgent to share. The informant brought Yang to the employee room on the first floor. Barely had Yang entered the room than Wang leapt on him like a tiger on his prey and subdued him. "Do you know who I am?" Wang shouted. Yang looked up and stammered, as if waking up from a dream. "Oh, you, you are Wang Lijun. It's totally worth it." Wang asked, "What do you mean by that?" Yang answered, "It's worth it, dying by your hand."

Another triad leader, Ho Jing, was a kung fu master. He fled after hearing police were after him. A month later, Wang received news that Ho had returned to the city and was hiding in his company headquarters. Wang, not wanting to arouse suspicion, took with him a single assistant, but as they arrived at the headquarters, Ho was spotted getting into his Peugeot 605. Ho recognized Wang and sped off and a car chase ensued. As Wang almost caught up with Ho, a tractor inadvertently blocked Wang's car and Ho had the chance of a clear escape. Wang was furious. But Ho's car got only a few meters' advantage before it stalled. Wang leaped at the opportunity and dragged Ho from the Peugeot as he struggled to restart it. As the story goes, kung fu master Ho and lone cop Wang fought for twenty minutes, Ho managing a choke hold on Wang that should have killed him, but Wang broke his grip and followed through by slamming Ho's head into the roadway, knocking him unconscious. Police reinforcements completed the arrest. Wang's face was covered with blood and deep cuts.

Wang's bravery earned him a number of accolades and his uniform was covered with medals. In 1995, he went on a nationwide lecture tour, touting the success of his anticrime programs in Tieling and explaining how a more alert and aggressive police crackdown could achieve good results. On the day he made his presentation to senior leaders at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, he was told by the local court that the mafia leaders he had captured would be executed. A government newspaper described Wang's reaction to the news:

Wang was eager to hear the gunshots of justice. When he finished his talk at the Great Hall, he quietly left the stage and stood in the hallway, where he called Ji Lianke, deputy director of the criminal investigation unit. "Director Wang, can you hear the gunshots? We are shooting the fourth one now," Ji reported to Wang, who held his phone tightly to his ear. "Bam!" Wang could hear the sound of gunshot through his phone. After the execution, several hundred residents spontaneously showed up in front of the city hall, carrying a twenty-meter-long banner to thank Wang Lijun.

During his tenure as deputy director and then director of public security in Tieling, Wang gained the nickname, "Biaozi," which in the local dialect means "a pigheaded and fearless person." For example, an officer who worked alongside Wang at the criminal investigation team said Wang used to forbid forensic experts from wearing masks and gloves, which he believed "impeded the expert's senses of smell and touch." At one time, he jumped into a waist-deep pond and dragged out a rotting corpse.

Although a tough fighter, Wang was also depicted by the local media as a man with a soft heart. According to one online story, Wang raided a house he believed harbored an escaped prisoner. After

Wang kicked the door open, the prisoner dashed toward him brandishing a cleaver. Wang dodged the attack but, though he had a clean shot, holstered his weapon and instead wrestled the man to the ground and disarmed him. He had seen a baby wriggling in the room's only bed. "You should thank your child for saving your life," he said. "I didn't want to traumatize the baby with gunshots."

Another story involved a mob leader who refused to cooperate with police during interrogation. Wang realized that the mafia leader's wife had also been detained and nobody was looking after her two children. Wang lobbied the court to grant parole to the leader's wife, allowing her to care for the children. At the same time, he hired a special chef to prepare halal food for the mafia leader, a Muslim, who was allegedly touched by Wang's compassion and freely answered Wang's questions and confessed to his crimes. Wang ordered a new suit for the mafia leader before sending him to the execution ground: "You used to be a somebody in the city," Wang was quoted as saying. "I want you to look decent when you leave this world."

Wang's life stories were later adapted into a nationally broadcast TV series, *The Iron-Blooded Police Spirit*. The director, who invited Wang to the set, described to a Chinese newspaper his first impression of Wang: "When he appeared, the room suddenly became smaller because of his physique and powerful presence. He sucked the air out of the room."

Initially, Wang was cast to play himself in the TV drama, but many did not feel it appropriate. Zhou Lijun, who penned the movie, said Wang was a born performer who had a flair for drama. As part of his research, Zhou followed Wang for ten days and went on an anti-pornography sweep with Wang one night:

Wang put me on the passenger seat of his Mitsubishi jeep and he personally drove me over to Tieling. The jeep looked very unique. Large characters—"Chinese Criminal Police"—were painted on both sides of the jeep. Wang told me the characters were copies of his own calligraphy and he had applied for a patent for those handwritten characters. The top of the jeep was equipped with eight high-voltage search lights, four in the front and four at the back. The jeep sped through the darkness and Wang didn't even bother to slow down when we crossed a railway track. My head bumped against the top of the vehicle several times as I held on tightly. His colleagues lagged way behind. Upon arrival, Wang issued some simple instructions and within minutes, his subordinates dispersed and went directly to their targets—hair salons, karaoke bars and massage parlors. While raiding a hair salon, police found no sign of anything shady. But Wang ordered the detention of a young man with dyed yellow hair. "A man with hair like that can't be any good," he barked.

Wang's high-profile anticrime campaigns worked. Official statistics showed that crime rates went down dramatically in Tieling. According to a police officer in Tieling, Wang enjoyed tremendous support from the lower ranks of society, such as the tricycle cabdrivers, many of whom were laid-off state workers and were easy targets for gang members who extorted protection money from them. Wang initiated a citywide crackdown and each time a gang member was caught bullying a cabdriver, the offender would be asked to pay a heavy fine and police would distribute the money on the spot to the tricycle cabdrivers as compensation. A popular story has it that Wang walked home one night and a tricycle cabdriver recognized him and insisted on driving him home. Wang politely declined and kept on. A few minutes later, he noticed that a dozen tricycles were silently escorting him.

There is a tendency toward propaganda among China's officialdom, and public stories about Wang were probably embellished by the state media, if they happened at all, or by his supporters who aimed to bolster his populist appeal. Still, there is no denying that many ordinary people in Tieling revered him. In an article posted on 360doc.com, the author, who identified himself as a resident from Tieling, compared Wang Lijun to Bao Zheng, a legendary official and judge in China's Song Dynasty, who was known for defending the rights of the ordinary people and who used a guillotine given to him by the emperor to execute criminals.

Wang's tough tactics against mobsters made him many enemies among local crime syndicates.

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