

Chinese trials reveal vast web of corruption

A recent crackdown and court cases in Chongqing have uncovered a murky underworld populated by crime bosses, lowly thugs, wealthy businessmen and Communist Party officials who through the country's mix of state control and free-market economics exercise pernicious powers

BY ANDREW JACOBS
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, CHONGQING, CHINA



Zhang Dinghua, with his petition, in Chongqing, China, on Oct. 27. He says his father was taken by the police after resisting eviction and has not been seen since.

PHOTOS: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE AND AP

Wen Qiang (文强) had a fondness for Louis Vuitton belts, fossilized dinosaur eggs and B-list pop stars. For a public employee in charge of the local judiciary, he also had a lot of money: nearly US\$3 million that investigators found buried beneath a fish pond.

But Wen's lavish tastes were nothing compared with the carnal appetites of his sister-in-law, Xie Caiping (谢才萍), known as "the godmother of the Chongqing underworld." Prosecutors say she ran 30 illegal casinos, including one across the street from the courthouse. She also employed 16 young men who, according to the state-run press, were exceedingly handsome and obliging.

In recent weeks, Xie, Wen and a cavalcade of ranking officials and lowbrow thugs have been players in a mass public trial that has exposed the unseemly relationship between gangsters, police officers and the sticky-fingered bureaucrats.

The spectacle involves more than 9,000 suspects, 50 public officials, a petulant billionaire and criminal organizations that dabbled in drug trafficking, illegal mining, and random acts of savagery, most notably the killing of a man for his unbearably loud karaoke voice.

But like all big corruption cases in China, this one is as much about politics as graft. The political machine in Chongqing, a province-size megacity of 31 million people in the southwest, has been broken up by a new Communist Party boss, Bo Xilai (薄熙来), who is the son of a revolutionary party veteran and has his eye on higher office.

Bo, a former trade minister sent to Chongqing to burnish his managerial credentials, has conducted the crackdown in a way that appears devised to maximize national attention. The drawn-out nature of the trial and the release of lurid details of the criminal syndicate have given Bo a new reputation as a leading corruption fighter, though the inquiry has yet to implicate any really high-ranking party officials.

So far six people have been sentenced to death. Xie got off relatively lightly, receiving an 18-year prison term on Tuesday.

How Bo's performance is regarded by the party elite is a matter of speculation. There are some suggestions that his swagger, including

boastful comments to the news media, strikes some fellow officials as excessive. Anti-corruption campaigns by China's one-party state are generally calibrated to show resolution in tackling venality, but also to reassure the public that whatever problems are uncovered are localized and effectively contained.

"These guys are all for fighting corruption, but they are a little alarmed by the way Bo Xilai has been going about it and building up his personality," said Sidney Rittenberg, one of the few American citizens to join the Communist Party here and a confidant of Chinese leaders since 1944. "People I talk to say he's getting too big for his britches."

A so-called princeling whose father, Bo Yibo (薄一波), was an economic planner and a onetime ally of the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping (邓小平), Bo, 60, is already a member of the Communist Party's powerful Politburo. He is often talked about as a future top leader in Beijing, although in the party's rigid hierarchy the No. 1 posts in the party and the government have already been assigned to other younger officials.

Recent statements by Bo suggest he understands the perils of drawing too much attention. Two weeks ago, he defended the crackdown, saying he was forced to act by the rampant violence and brazen criminality that had given this perpetually foggy city a reputation for lawlessness.

"The public gathered outside government offices and held up pictures of bloodshed," he said. "The gangsters slashed people with knives just like butchers killing animals."

In the three weeks since trials began, the crowds have continued to come, and their stories of bloodshed are indeed horrifying. They press outside the gates of the 5th Intermediate Court, hoping to glimpse the orange-vested defendants who are paraded through the hearings.

Others desperately seek out reporters willing to hear tales of crimes unpunished. "The bandits used to live in the mountains; now they live in the Public Security Bureau," said Zheng Yi, a vegetable wholesaler.

Unlike past sweeps that brought down crime bosses and their henchmen, the crackdown in Chongqing has yielded a number of wealthy businessmen and Communist Party officials,

exposing the depth of corruption that has resulted from the mixing of state control and free-market economics in China.

Ko-lin Chin, who studies the intermingling of organized crime and government in China, said the line between legitimate business and illegal conduct had become increasingly blurred, although most official corruption involved bribery, not violence.

"As these gangs have become more powerful, their existence depends entirely on the cooperation and tolerance of the Communist Party," said Chin, a professor of criminal justice at Rutgers. "But when things get out of hand, as they did in Chongqing, the party can really go after these groups with a vengeance."

Among those on trial this week is Li Qiang (黎强), a local legislator and billionaire who the authorities say owned a fleet of 1,000 cabs and 100 bus routes. So great was his power, they say, that he orchestrated a taxi strike last year that brought the city to a standstill. On trial with him are three government officials suspected of acting as his "protection umbrellas" in exchange for payments of about US\$100,000 each.

While Li stood in the dock, more than 200 people gathered outside in the rain, including women who said they were roughed up in October last year when they refused to vacate their homes for a redevelopment project. One of them, Wu Pinghui, 67, said 40 people were herded into a government-owned bus and dumped in the countryside. By the time they made it back, their homes were gone.

"We called 110," she said, referring to the Chinese emergency number, "but the police said they couldn't get involved in a government affair."

Hong Guibi also came to the courthouse. She said the Communist Party chief of her village, enraged when she and her husband refused to give him part of their orchard, watched as thugs attacked the couple with cleavers. Hong, 47, was critically wounded, and her husband was killed. "The neighbors heard our screams, but they were afraid to do anything," she said.

Although heartened that so many are being prosecuted, Hong is still waiting for someone to prosecute the village chief. "If I could just kneel down in front of Bo Xilai," she said, "I'm sure he would solve my problem."

'Godmother of the underworld'

BY TANIA BRANIGAN
THE GUARDIAN, BEIJING

A string of gambling dens; a young lover lavished with gifts; brutal tactics that included the beating of an undercover cop investigating the powerful crime syndicate. Xie Caiping had all the hallmarks of a typical gang boss — with one big difference: she was a woman.

The "godmother of the underworld" has been jailed for 18 years, the state news agency Xinhua reported on Tuesday.

- Residents have been agog at details of 46-year-old Xie's case, with several expressing amazement that a woman could head a "black society."
- Xie is the sister-in-law of Wen Qiang, for many years the city's deputy police chief and then director of its justice bureau, until his detention in August. He has been accused of sheltering gangs and will stand trial shortly on a string of charges.
- One of Xie's gambling halls was in a hotel opposite the Chongqing high court and next to the municipal prosecutor's office.
- Xie was convicted of organizing and leading a criminal syndicate, running gambling dens, illegal imprisonment, harboring people taking illegal drugs and giving bribes to officials, said Xinhua.
- Living up to the stereotype of the hard-bitten gangster, she swore in court, to the displeasure of the judge.
- One associate described her as "good at debating and drinking, and very helpful to friends."



Windows 7's hidden gems

Under the hood, Microsoft's new operating system packs discrete features that are a vast improvement on Windows Vista and make computing more efficient and safer

BY JAY DOUGHERTY
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Windows 7's headline features naturally get all the attention. If you've read anything about Microsoft's latest operating system, you probably already know that Windows 7 is faster, more compatible, and less annoying than Windows Vista. But Microsoft has also sneaked quite a few less visible but still noteworthy features into Windows 7. Here are a few.

SHAKE

Let's say you have dozens of applications open on your Windows 7 desktop — so many, in fact, that that you have a difficult time sorting through them all, or you have difficulty concentrating on the foreground application because of everything else that's open. Sound familiar?

In previous versions of Windows, you'd typically have to close all of those applications in order to get some sanity back into your desktop. Not anymore — thanks to the new feature dubbed "shake." True to its name, the feature is activated by grabbing the title bar of an open application with your mouse cursor and then "shaking" the program back and forth a few times. When you do, everything else that's open on your desktop is minimized automatically.

Perform the shake operation again, and the clutter returns to your desktop, exactly as it was before.

PROBLEM RECORDER

How often have you had to try to describe a problem you're having with your Windows computer, and the person you're describing the problem to acts like you're talking in a foreign language? Or how often have you, as the local computer expert, had to rely on

someone's fuzzy description of a problem?

In Windows 7, there's help for both scenarios in the form of the new Problem Steps Recorder. In a nutshell, the Problem Steps Recorder, or PRS for short, will record exactly what you're doing on your PC that results in a problem. Optionally, you can use the tool's Add Comment feature to add a note about what issue you're experiencing. When you're finished, PRS packages up the recording in a compressed ZIP file. Open the ZIP file, and out pops an "nhht" that can be viewed with Internet Explorer.

To start PRS, just open the Windows 7 Start menu, and type "PRS." Click Start Record, and then walk through the steps that result in a problem. Click Stop Record, and you'll be asked to indicate a location on your hard drive where the zipped file will be created.

ISO BURNING

For quite a while now, the preferred way to copy and store installation CDs and DVDs has been to create "ISO" files of the entire disk. An ISO file is a single image of the contents of the entire disk. To create an ISO file, you must use a third-party ISO creation tool such as UltraISO or the free ImgBurn.

Reading ISO files also required a third-party tool, at least until now. Windows 7's new Windows Disc Image Burner, which comes free with all editions of Windows 7, allows the operating system to recognize ISO files and burn their contents to a CD or DVD drive. To activate Disc Image Burner, you merely double-click an ISO file.

BITLOCKER TO GO

USB flash drives are everywhere these days, and with good reason: they hold a lot of data, and they're small and convenient

to carry. There's just one problem: anyone who happens upon your unencrypted flash drive can read whatever data you have stored there. And that could be a very big problem if you frequently transport sensitive information.

The solution: Windows 7's BitLocker To Go technology, built into the Ultimate and Enterprise editions of the operating system. Using BitLocker To Go couldn't be easier. You simply plug your USB flash drive into a USB port, right-click the resulting drive in Windows Explorer, and select Turn on BitLocker from the pop-up menu.

When you do, a BitLocker Drive Encryption dialog box appears, presenting you with the opportunity to password-protect the drive. You will then either save or print the BitLocker recovery key, and then BitLocker goes to work, encrypting your drive so that only someone with the recovery key can access it.

STICKY NOTES

They might not be as technically sophisticated as BitLocker, but Windows 7's "sticky notes" are a useful little feature that will come in handy for many. Sticky notes will be familiar to many computer users: the stereotypical "geek" generally has these pasted all over the computer monitor. Thanks to Windows 7's implementation of electronic sticky notes, you can throw those paper ones away once and for all.

Just open the Windows 7 Start menu, and type "sticky" to call up the shortcut that launches Sticky Notes. There's hardly any learning required to begin using them. Just type your notes onto the yellow sticky that appears. The note will stay stuck to your monitor until you specifically close the application. If you end up with a lot of sticky notes, you can make them different colors by right-clicking a sticky and choosing a

color other than yellow. Keeping "to do" lists has never been so much fun.

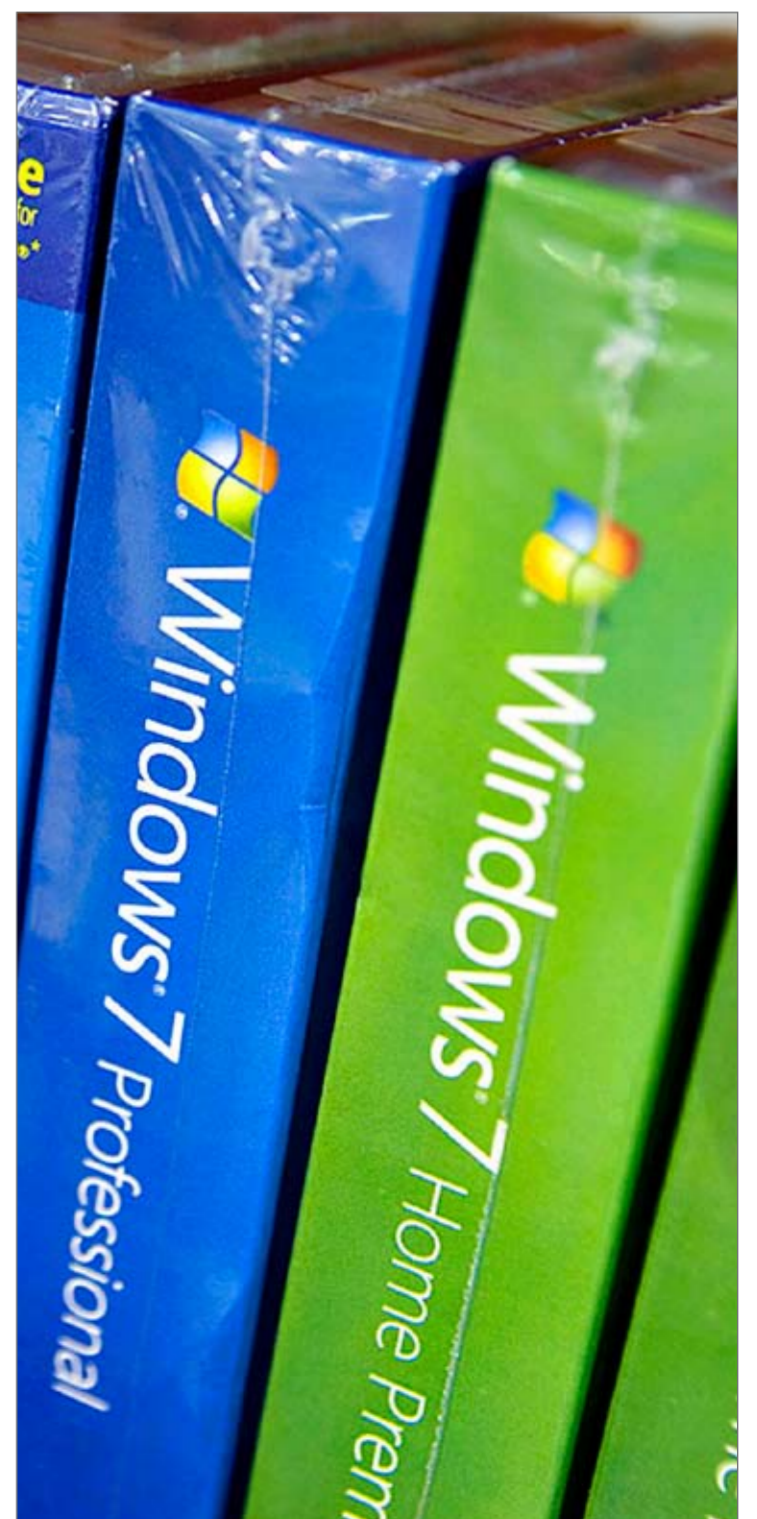
GUEST ACCOUNTS

If you occasionally share your computer but do not want others to be able to alter anything, you'll probably love the new Windows 7 Guest Account feature. If you activate Guest Accounts, you essentially allow anyone to log on to your PC as "guest." A guest will have his or her own desktop and settings — and yours will be kept completely private. Guests are not allowed to install any software or change any system settings. Nor are they allowed to write files to any directory outside of their special guest area. No doubt this concept will be very appealing to families in which kids.

SECURITY ESSENTIALS

While not officially a Windows 7 feature, Microsoft's free Security Essentials add-on (www.microsoft.com/Security_Essentials/) is a must-have for Windows 7 users who are tired of handing over hard-earned cash for subscriptions to commercial antivirus and anti-spyware packages.

Security Essentials is the successor to Microsoft's first foray into the antivirus world, the now-discontinued OneCare product. Security Essentials appears to be every bit as unobtrusive and reliable as OneCare. Plus, with the backing of the Microsoft Malware Protection Centre (MMPC), Microsoft appears to be engaging full-throttle in the competitive antivirus software arena. Given Security Essentials' price (free), Microsoft's name, and the product's apparent competence, Security Essentials removes any remaining excuses Windows users might have about not implementing security software.



Goodbye Vista, hello Windows 7.

PHOTOS: BLOOMBERG