

Document 12.7: Excerpt from Wen Yiduo's speech at the memorial service for Li Gongbu, 1946

Wen Yiduo was one of China's most talented poets and a persistent critic of the Guomindang. He had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and Colorado College, and in the late 1920s became a professor of English and American literature at Nanjing University. When the Japanese occupied most of eastern China in 1937 and 1938, hundreds of thousands of Chinese men, women, and children fled to the western regions. The government was reestablished in Chongqing and a number of universities from China's coastal (occupied) cities set up classes in Kunming, Yunnan Province. Wen went to Kunming as well, to teach at South-West United University.

As the Guomindang-Communist conflict intensified, he became increasingly angered, especially by the corruption within the army. Even though he considered himself a "bookworm," Wen did not shy away from speaking out. "If I don't do anything about it, nobody else ever will!" Wen exclaimed.¹ In 1944, Wen joined the Democratic League, a movement composed largely of Western-style liberals critical of the government. As his speeches began to draw larger and larger crowds, he was blacklisted by Chiang's secret police.

We all know that, only a few days ago, the most despicable, the most shameless incident occurred in Kunming. What crime had Li Gongbu committed to deserve such an ending in unconscionable hands!... Today I want to know if there are more secret agents here, right here. Step up, you, tell us, why you killed Li Gongbu...

You reactionaries, you try so hard to alienate us from our friends. What shame! You think now that Lianda [University] has moved away and the students have dispersed for the summer, you think we are powerless now. But, secret agents, you are wrong! Look at the thousand and more young people gathered here, our arms linked together. We, the young generation of Kunming, shall not tolerate your reckless action.... We are not afraid

¹ Kai-yu Hsu, *Wen I-to* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), 156-157.

of death; we are constantly ready to follow in Li Gongbu's footsteps. The moment we step out of this door, we don't think of stepping back!

Five hours after giving this speech, as Wen was leaving the office of the Democratic Weekly, he was gunned down.

Source: Reprinted in Hsu, Kai-yu. *Wen I-to*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980, p. 173.