Bo Guagua Defends Father Bo Xilai in Statement

By JEREMY PAGE

BELJING—The Harvard-educated son of ousted Chinese politician Bo Xilai spoke out in defense of his father for the first time, questioning a catalog of accusations from the Communist Party leadership, which include that the onetime political highflier took bribes and had sexual relations with several women.

Bo Guagua’s first public statement openly questioning the party’s allegations against his father highlights his potential to undermine the official narrative of the Bo scandal that analysts say Chinese leaders are trying to establish ahead of a once-a-decade leadership change in November.

The younger Mr. Bo, who friends believe is in the U.S., said he found it hard to believe the allegations made by the Chinese leadership on Friday as it expelled his father from the party and launched criminal proceedings against him that analysts say will almost certainly result in a trial and a stiff sentence.
"Personally, it is hard for me to believe the allegations that were announced against my father, because they contradict everything I have come to know about him throughout my life," Bo Guagua, who is 24 years old, said in a statement on a Tumblr microblog account dated Saturday.

"Although the policies my father enacted are open to debate, the father I know is upright in his beliefs and devoted to duty," he said in an apparent reference to Mr. Bo’s controversial policies as party chief of the city of Chongqing, which included a Maoist revival movement.

Bo Guagua sent a link to the statement, which was written in English, in an email to The Wall Street Journal on Sunday in response to a request for comment about Friday’s announcement. He had previously declined to comment on the investigation into his father.

The statement continued: "He has always taught me to be my own person and to have concern for causes greater than ourselves. I have tried to follow his advice. At this point, I expect the legal process to follow its normal course, and I will await the result."

He didn’t respond to a further email asking about his own plans and whether he felt he could return to China. Bo Guagua is the only son of Bo Xilai and Gu Kailai, who was convicted in August of murdering British businessman Neil Heywood.

He was educated at two private boarding schools in Britain before studying at the University of Oxford and Harvard University, where he graduated from the Kennedy School with a master’s degree in May.

He issued a defiant statement in April through the Harvard Crimson student newspaper, expressing concern for his family and denying he had led a lavish lifestyle overseas. He also said his tuition had been paid for mostly by his mother’s income as a lawyer and writer and by scholarships, although he declined to say from whom.

Since graduating, he has kept a low profile, and analysts say he was most likely being advised not to risk exacerbating his parents’ situation or jeopardizing his own ability to remain in the U.S. or return to China. U.S. officials said recently they weren’t in contact with him and he hadn’t applied for asylum.

However, analysts say Bo Guagua—a fluent English speaker with an international network of influential friends—could become a powerful critic of the Chinese regime, with inside knowledge of many top leaders’ family lives, if his father is given an excessively harsh penalty.

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Cheng Li, an expert on Chinese politics at the Brookings Institute.
Guagua issued a brief public statement in which he said he had provided witness testimony to her lawyers, but gave no details of its contents. "I have faith that facts will speak for themselves," he said in the statement to CNN at that time, which he confirmed was genuine in a separate email to The Wall Street Journal.

He has declined to comment on his mother's case since her conviction, and didn't mention it in Saturday's statement. He also repeatedly has declined to comment on his relationship with Mr. Heywood. Friends of the Briton say he had been a close friend and adviser to the family since getting to know them while living in the 1990s in the northeastern city of Dalian, where Mr. Bo was then mayor.

They also say that he helped to make arrangements for Bo Guagua to study at Britain's Harrow School, which Mr. Heywood also attended.

Chinese authorities haven't accused Bo Guagua of any wrongdoing. But they have mentioned the son of Mr. Bo and Ms. Gu several times in official accounts of the trials of Ms. Gu and of Wang Lijun, the former Chongqing police chief who fled to a U.S. consulate in February and told U.S. diplomats he had evidence that Ms. Gu killed Mr. Heywood.

In Ms. Gu's trial, prosecutors said she had killed Mr. Heywood because she thought he had threatened her son after they became embroiled in a business dispute over a failed land deal, according to state-run Xinhua news agency.

Unofficial accounts from observers at the trial quoted prosecutors saying Mr. Heywood had demanded £13 million ($21 million) from the Bo family and at one point "detained" Bo Guagua in Britain.

However, several friends of Mr. Heywood have disputed that, saying Mr. Heywood's relations with Bo Guagua appeared to be good right up until his death, and pointing out that at the time of the alleged detention, Mr. Heywood was in China and Bo Guagua was studying in the U.S.
Last week, a leading Chinese forensic expert, Wang Xuemei, wrote a long blog post arguing that Chinese authorities hadn't presented sufficient evidence to prove that Mr. Heywood had died from cyanide poisoning.

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