

# LOCKED UP

INSIDE CHINA'S SECRET RSDL JAILS



safeguard  
DEFENDERS

*Locked Up: Inside China's RSDL Secret Jails* is an illustrated deep dive into the dark reality of Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location or RSDL. This little-known custodial system is a legalized form of black jail, where victims are disappeared by the state into incommunicado isolated detention for up to six months, sometimes more. With virtually no judicial oversight, RSDL represents a heightened risk of torture and maltreatment for victims. The use of artwork and imagined documentation in this report is designed to bring to life first-person testimony so that the reader is brought into the cell, into the interrogation room, and even the tiger chair. *Locked up* is partly based on, and a companion publication to, [The People's Republic of the Disappeared](#), the first in-depth accounts of RSDL as told by its victims.

## About Safeguard Defenders

Safeguard Defenders is a human rights NGO founded in late 2016. It undertakes and supports local field activities that contribute to the protection of basic rights, promote the rule of law and enhance the ability of local civil society and human rights defenders in some of the most hostile environments in Asia.

<https://safeguarddefenders.com> | [@safeguarddefend](#)

safeguard  
DEFENDERS

Locked up: Inside China's Secret RSDL Jails

© 2021 Safeguard Defenders | Cover image by Badiuca, artwork by Antlem, Sachira and Sandra Soler Peyton, layout and design by Sandra Soler Peyton, research and writing by Dinah Gardner.

Published by Safeguard Defenders

All rights reserved.

This report may not be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in whole or in part by any means including graphic, electronic, or mechanical without expressed written consent of the publisher/author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in articles and reviews.

Keywords: China, Human Rights, Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location (RSDL), Torture, Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

INTRODUCTION.....	4
PART ONE: THE RAID.....	6
PART TWO: INSIDE RSDL.....	10
THE FACILITY .....	12
RSDL LOCATIONS .....	14
DAILY LIFE .....	16
THE CELL .....	22
THE INTERROGATION ROOM .....	28
TORTURE AND THREATS .....	32
PART THREE: RELEASE.....	36
AFTERWORD.....	40
APPENDIX I: RSDL VICTIMS.....	41
APPENDIX II: MAP OF OVERSEAS RSDL VICTIMS.....	42
REFERENCES.....	44

*When the black hood was taken off,  
I found myself in a padded room.*

Li Qiaochu, rights activist.

In the year that Xi Jinping became president of China - 2013 - a custodial system was introduced that gave police the powers to disappear anyone into a secret facility, deny them all contact with the outside world, including legal counsel and family, and interrogate them at will, for a total of up to six months. The system gave police officers from the ministries of Public Security and State Security the powers to act with virtually no oversight, ensuring that they could arbitrarily detain, coerce confessions from, and torture, threaten and mistreat victims. The system is called **Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location** or **RSDL** (指定居所监视居住 in Chinese).

Article 75 of China's Criminal Procedure Law (2018 revision) (CPL) contains minimal safeguards for those subjected to RSDL, such as prosecutor oversight of the decision to impose RSDL and a requirement to notify the family within 24 hours, but these are routinely bypassed by police who either simply ignore them or invoke exceptions by asserting the victim is suspected of national security crimes. RSDL is an extra-judicial measure, there is no requirement for a court order and is imposed before arrest.

In the more than eight years since RSDL's introduction, UN experts have repeatedly called on China to repeal the system, citing serious human rights concerns. In 2018, ten UN Special Procedures, including the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, described RSDL as "analogous to incommunicado and secret detention and tantamount to enforced disappearance; they expose those subjected to RSDL to the risk of torture and other inhuman and degrading

treatment and other human rights violations."<sup>1</sup> An ongoing, longform study by Safeguard Defenders, utilising interviews with victims, victims' families and friends, and supplemented by online research, has revealed shocking details of conditions in RSDL. As of June 2021, we have documented **175** individual cases. While our research has focused on human rights defenders, there is no reason to believe that conditions are significantly better for other victims.<sup>2</sup> It is almost unheard of for police to permit lawyer access (just one case recorded), to allow contact with family (four cases) and to allow prosecutor visits (two cases). Police routinely keep victims locked up in RSDL for the maximum allowed limit of a full six months (32 cases). There is also abundant evidence that RSDL is frequently used outside its stated purpose - the investigation phase of a criminal case - since a significant proportion of RSDL victims are never formally arrested (52 victims, or just under a third, were released on bail or simply freed). Instead, it is thought RSDL may be being used as a tool of intimidation and to coerce testimony against others.

While the vast majority of its victims are Chinese, RSDL has also been imposed on a number of foreigners. Some of the more well-known individuals include victims of China's hostage diplomacy - Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, Swedish bookseller Gui Minhai, who was kidnapped by Chinese state agents from Thailand, Swedish rights activist Peter Dahlin (who is also the founding director of this report's publisher, Safeguard Defenders), Taiwanese NGO worker Lee Ming-che and even a US basketball player called Jeff Harper. In some cases, diplomatic access has been denied to foreign RSDL victims (Australian writer Yang Hengjun).<sup>2</sup>

While the law on RSDL legalized the illegal, this is often not enough for the police, who

typically violate its regulations over and beyond the use of exceptions. We recorded six cases where the prisoner was kept for longer than the maximum six months, including one victim who was subjected to RSDL for almost **four years!**<sup>4</sup> Even Jeff Harper's RSDL lasted an illegal eight months. The CPL stipulates that the location of RSDL must be apart from the place of interrogation - although there is no clarification in the wording of the law if a room in the same building or the same facility would be acceptable. However, many victims report that it was routine for officers to interrogate them at length in their cell.

RSDL takes place at a secret location, police do not make public where detainees are kept. And because victims are often black hooded when they are transferred into and out of RSDL and cell windows are blocked by heavy curtains, few can identify the location beyond a rough estimate. A variety of types of places are used: custom-built facilities, police training centres and guesthouses, or government-owned apartment buildings are among those we have recorded. Two female RSDL victims, lawyer Wang Yu (王宇) and women's rights defender Li Qiaochu (李翘楚) report spotting the name, Beijing Tongda Asset Management Co. (北京通达资产管理集团公司) on paperwork used at their RSDL location. Beijing Tongda is a subsidiary of Beijing Sifu Enterprise Management Office (北京市四服企业管理办公室)<sup>5</sup>, a division of Beijing Public Security.<sup>6</sup>

Victims of RSDL report both physical and psychological tortures including sleep deprivation, food deprivation, extended time in combined shackles and cuffs (sometimes for weeks), beatings, forced medication, denial of medical treatment, sexual abuse, stress positions held for extended periods (such as being hung by the wrists) and threats of physical harm to them and their loved ones. As can be

imagined, the effects of these tortures last well beyond the RSDL term.

Accessing legal databases<sup>7</sup> reveals that the scale and scope of RSDL has ballooned since it began. In 2013, less than 500 people were held in RSDL, by 2019 that number had risen to over 6,000. Using conservative estimates, 20 people a day were being placed in RSDL in China in 2020. By definition, when enforced disappearance is carried out at scale or systematically, it is considered a "crime against humanity" under international human rights norms.

Despite the gravity of the human rights violations inflicted by RSDL, it is little known outside the world of human rights NGOs working on China. This is due in part to how it is carried out - in secret. There are few images of RSDL facilities and most victims are scared to speak out for fear of being punished again. In 2017, Safeguard Defenders was one of the first organizations to draw attention to RSDL with a ground-breaking book, *The People's Republic of the Disappeared* (now in its second edition with new stories), made up of first-person testimonies from a few brave individuals who dared to speak out.

*Locked Up: Inside China's Secret RSDL Jails* is an attempt to remedy this lack of awareness by **bringing alive** the stories told by its victims with the use of artwork and second person narrative to allow the reader to travel, black hooded, right into the hidden facility, into the cell, into the interrogation room, and even into the tiger chair. Every detail in *Locked Up* is sourced from testimony provided by victims, their families or lawyers. Our hope is that readers of this illustrated book will develop an understanding of RSDL and empathy for its victims, and be inspired to join a growing international movement condemning China for its gross violations of human rights as represented by this system of state-sanctioned kidnappings.

# PART ONE: THE RAID

*They quickly dragged me into the back of a car, pushing me onto the floor. Feet were placed on my back; it felt like there were two people on the rear seats. I heard one, it sounded like he was on his phone. "We got him!" he said.*

Zhai Yanmin, rights activist

Surprise is the defining aspect of an RSDL raid. Teams of domestic security police (sometimes state security officers), usually numbering at least a dozen, some uniformed in plain clothes, without warning swoop in at night when you are asleep at home or in a hotel. They might bang on the door at midnight, break the lock with a drill or get the building security guard to pretend something's happened to your car to lure you out of your apartment. Or it might happen during the day when you're relaxing at home or even having lunch in a restaurant.

Officers will swiftly overpower you, force you to the ground and cuff your hands behind your back, while another officer continuously trains a camera on you. They may or may not show you paperwork, such as a detention notice or warrant. If you're at home, they will confiscate anything they like, including laptops, phones,

papers. Maybe even your child's iPad. Once they have everything, a suffocating black hood will be placed over your head, you'll be bundled into the back of a car or a van and told to keep your head down.

The first stop is often a police station, where you may stay a day or two locked into an interrogation chair (also known as a tiger chair) while the police decide whether or not to use RSDL. Sometimes RSDL is administered immediately. Whenever that decision is made, you'll be black hooded again, tossed back into the back of a vehicle, and driven for several hours until you arrive. It could be a military facility, government guesthouse, or anonymous residential block.

And just like that, your six months of incommunicado, isolated **residential surveillance at a designated location** begins.



**Illustration on page 7:** Police often snatch victims from their homes after nightfall before black hooding them and transferring them into RSDL. Artwork by Antlem.

A tall grey stone building loomed on one side, reflecting the shadows of a few cars shining headlights into the darkness. Fear gripped me... Someone jumped out and opened the car door. The blinding light of a video camera blasted into my face. Four men escorted me up several steps into the icy building.

**JULIA GARRATT**



I was in bed with my girlfriend... when, at around 10 at night, we were startled by a sharp knock on the door... I opened the door in my underwear, greeting the authorities and their assembled cameras with a faux sense of calm and surprise, boosted by the hope that the Xanax pill I had popped on my way to greet them would soon take effect.

**PETER DAHLIN**

In the raid, they searched everything, every corner, every piece of paper. They took out all my ID cards, bankcards, digital equipment, even my kindle and various useless chargers. They took everything.

**CHEN ZHIXU**

You are now under Residential Surveillance in a Designated Location. Your only right is to obey.

**XIE YANG**

Five or six people, none of whom wore police uniforms or showed their ID, got out of a car outside the door. They took out a black hood and put it over my head. Suddenly I could not see anything. It was the first time I had experienced anything like this. I was so terrified that my legs were trembling and my mind went blank. I was carried by the arms by two people and pushed into the car.

**LI QIAOCHU**

I felt the car return to the East Sixth Road and head south and then we got onto the expressway. We stopped after about 40 minutes. I could hear the sound of an electric gate opening, we drove for a short while and then stopped. A voice said: 'We're here.'

**LIU SIXIN**

Two men rushed me from behind and grabbed my arms. Surrounded and startled, five husky men stood centimetres from my face. One flashed a badge. Oversized video cameras filmed me protesting as they pulled me towards the lobby door.

**KEVIN GARRATT**

The moment they announced the RSDL decision, the police placed me in handcuffs. They started videoing me. Perhaps I had seen and heard of too many evil things in China. I had an expressionless face. Part of me wanted to say something in protest, but I knew it would be useless, like the lamb protesting the wolf's ferocity.

**SUI MUQING**

I tried to phone for help, but before anyone could answer, someone had already broken through the door, and was instantly upon me. The light from his headlamp flashed into my face as he spoke, 'Don't move! We're from Beijing Public Security Bureau'.

**WANG YU**

I was waiting for my lunch, a bowl of cold noodles, when I was kidnapped... all of a sudden, a group of people charged over and pushed me to the ground. They kned me in my back and in an instant had covered my head with a black hood before I had a chance to say anything. I remember seeing several people filming everything before I was slammed to the floor.

**ZHAI YANMIN**



# PART TWO: INSIDE RSDL

*During November and December, I saw through the slit in the curtain that it had snowed outside; the ground was covered in white. That brought me inexpressible joy.*

Liu Sixin, legal scholar

RSDL is shrouded in secrecy. You might be held in a custom-built facility (as shown on pages 12-13), remodelled detention centre, police training centre, guesthouse or apartment complex. These buildings are usually owned by the police, people's armed police, state security, the military or another branch of the government.

If it's a custom-built facility, you'll likely be in a remote location and your prison will come equipped with interrogation rooms, doors with key card locks and a complex system of surveillance cameras. If, for whatever reason, you are left alone with a single guard or officer, they will be locked in with you, so even if you could overpower them, escape is impossible.

You will be black hooded on your way to RSDL and black hooded on your way out too, ensuring that the "designated location" remains a secret. However, by peeking through the bottom edge of the hood, a gap in the curtains, or the corner of the bathroom window (if there is one), you might be able to catch a glimpse of something - a range of mountains, a sign, or some distinctive building - that may give you a

clue. You might spot the name of your location on headed paper that you will be given to write confessions on, or perhaps on the interrogation notes that you will have to sign. During the months of long hours of solitary confinement, you might glean other clues, such as sounds coming from outside, including vehicles on a highway or planes taking off and landing. There are other prisoners here too, so don't be surprised when you hear screams and banging coming from elsewhere in the building.

Police may or may not provide a notice of detention under RSDL to your family. If you are a foreigner, they may or may not provide timely notice that you are under RSDL to your embassy. They are required to do both by law, but frequently flout this legal safeguard, sometimes by invoking exceptions based on national security.

At any time, the police may decide to move you - either to a different cell in the same facility or to a different facility in the same or another city or province.<sup>8</sup> But ultimately, it's all the same: incommunicado solitary detention at a secret location for months on end.

**Illustration on pages 12-13:** 3-D of one wing of a custom-built Ministry of State Security-run RSDL facility, based on the experiences of five different victims including Peter Dahlin, who was held here in January 2016. Artwork by Sachira

**Illustration on pages 14-15:** RSDL takes place at secret sites; some victims manage to use clues to figure out the approximate location. Images from googlemaps.

I was secretly transferred to a residential surveillance location in Tianjin. It must have been in a People's Armed Police building, since I was guarded by armed police officers.

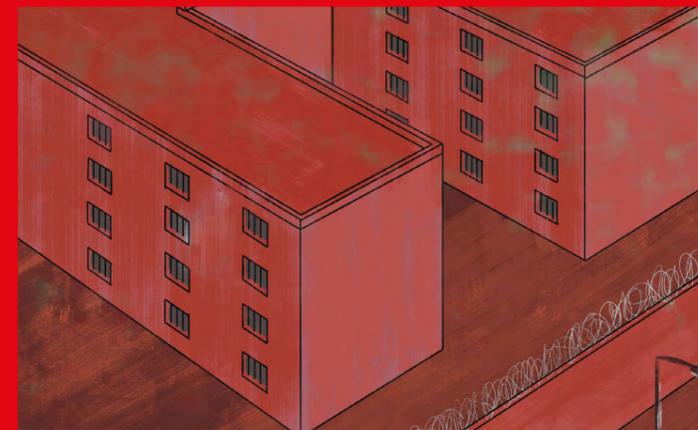
XIE YANYI

I was placed inside the Guangzhou Police Training Centre, a place specifically designed for political prisoners, known as Guangdong's "Qincheng Prison"... I was held on the fourth floor. The doors to the corridors on the third and fourth floors were locked. Only investigators and guards were allowed to enter.

SUI MUQING

The place where I was taken was far outside of the city centre, a building with four floors.

PAN JINLING



We drove for about another hour. I could see from the gap in the hood that we were entering another gate, this one with armed soldiers outside. They even wore army helmets. They must have realized something was wrong, as they adjusted my hood again and I was plunged back into darkness.

WANG YU

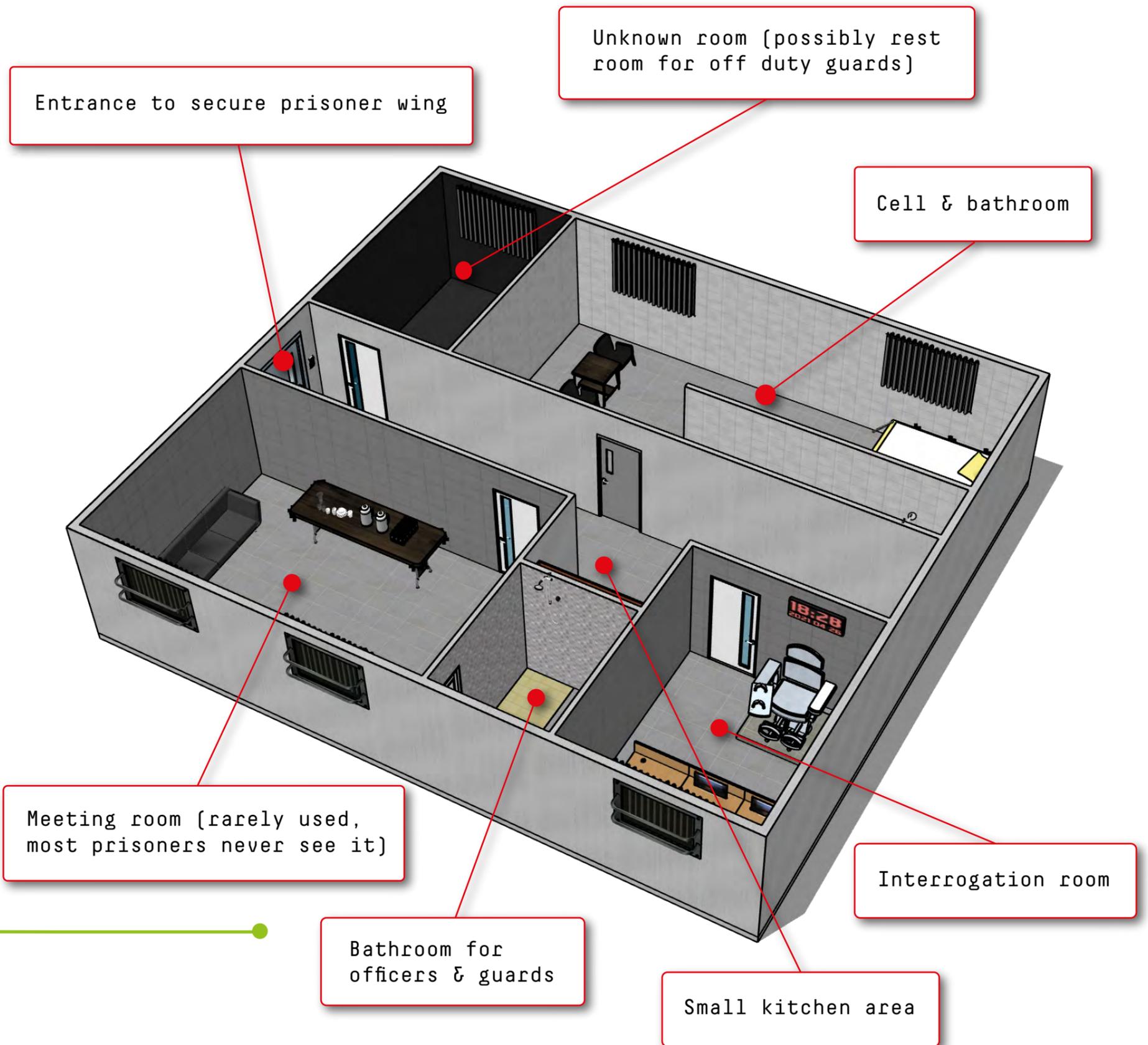
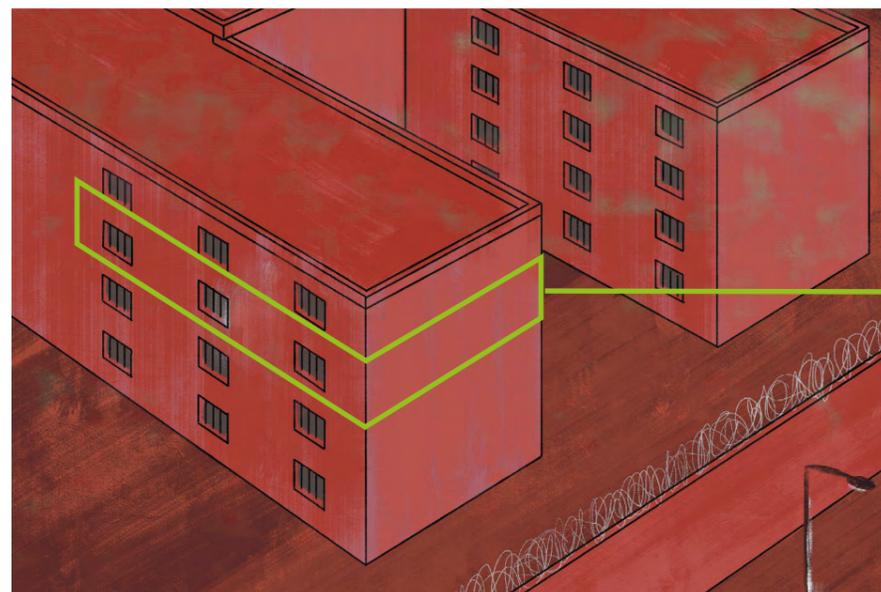
The window was fully closed, you could only see out through a tiny crack where the heavy curtains met in the middle. I saw trucks speeding past; I guessed it was a highway.

ZHAI YANMIN

[I was held in] an apartment complex... it looked like everyone there was from the police... There was a school not too far from me, I could hear the little kids when school was over.

JEFF HARPER

# THE FACILITY



# RSDL LOCATIONS



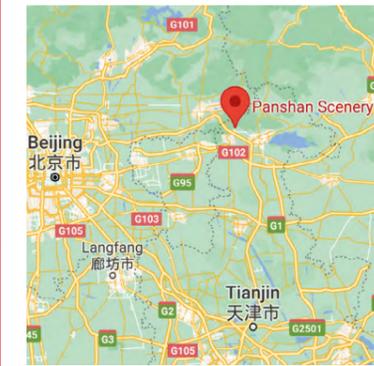
**RSDL type:** custom-built facility  
**Address:** Fengtai District, Beijing  
**Known and suspected victims:** Swedish rights activist Peter Dahlin, Dahlin's girlfriend Pan Jinling, Canadian former diplomat Michael Kovrig, Australians journalist Cheng Lei and writer Yang Hengjun



**RSDL type:** police-owned guesthouse  
**Location:** Exact location unknown. Beijing Tongda Asset Management Co. Guesthouse, near sixth south ring road, Daxing District, Beijing  
**Known victims:** rights activist Li Qiaochu, human rights lawyer Wang Yu



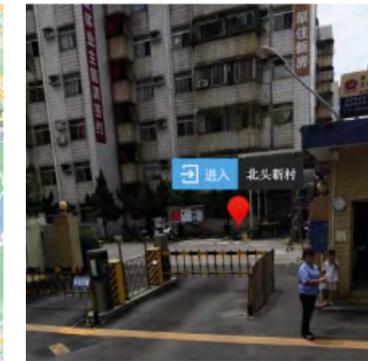
**RSDL type:** state-owned hotel  
**Address:** Baotai Hotel, Baoji, Shaanxi  
**Known victims:** human rights lawyer Chang Weiping



**RSDL type:** police-owned guesthouse  
**Address:** Tianjin Jinan Guesthouse, Panshan Scenic Area, Tianjin  
**Known and suspected victims:** human rights lawyers Wang Quanzhang, Wang Yu and Xie Yanyi



**RSDL type:** police training centre  
**Address:** Guangzhou Public Security Bureau People's Police Training Centre, Dashi Town, Panyu District, Guangzhou  
**Known victims:** human rights lawyer Sui Muqing



**RSDL type:** residential compound  
**Address:** Room 502, Building 2, Beitouxin Village, Nanshan District, Shenzhen, Guangdong  
**Known victims:** US basketball player Jeff Harper



Life in RSDL is defined by isolation, boredom and fear. Your only company will be the two guards assigned to watch you 24 hours a day (even when you go to the toilet) and, when they come, your interrogators. In the very first few hours, you will likely be asked to strip naked – male and female alike – guards will move in and scrutinize your body looking for smuggled items in orifices. You will be given a grubby t-shirt and sweatpants to put on, which you will wear day and night. They're often grey. And for your feet, plastic sandals. If you wear glasses, they may be taken away from you. Few victims are lucky enough to be granted reading material anyway, but it will make it difficult to check interrogation records that you will be asked to sign if you don't get them back.

Early on, likely the first day, your body will be prodded and measured by a medical team. They'll note down your weight and blood pressure. They may prescribe you drugs for diseases you've never had. The guards will make sure you take them. Every time. Maybe you'll feel nothing, but many victims report that the drugs made their thinking slow and cloudy. You'll get regular "medical" checks. For some victims, it's every morning.

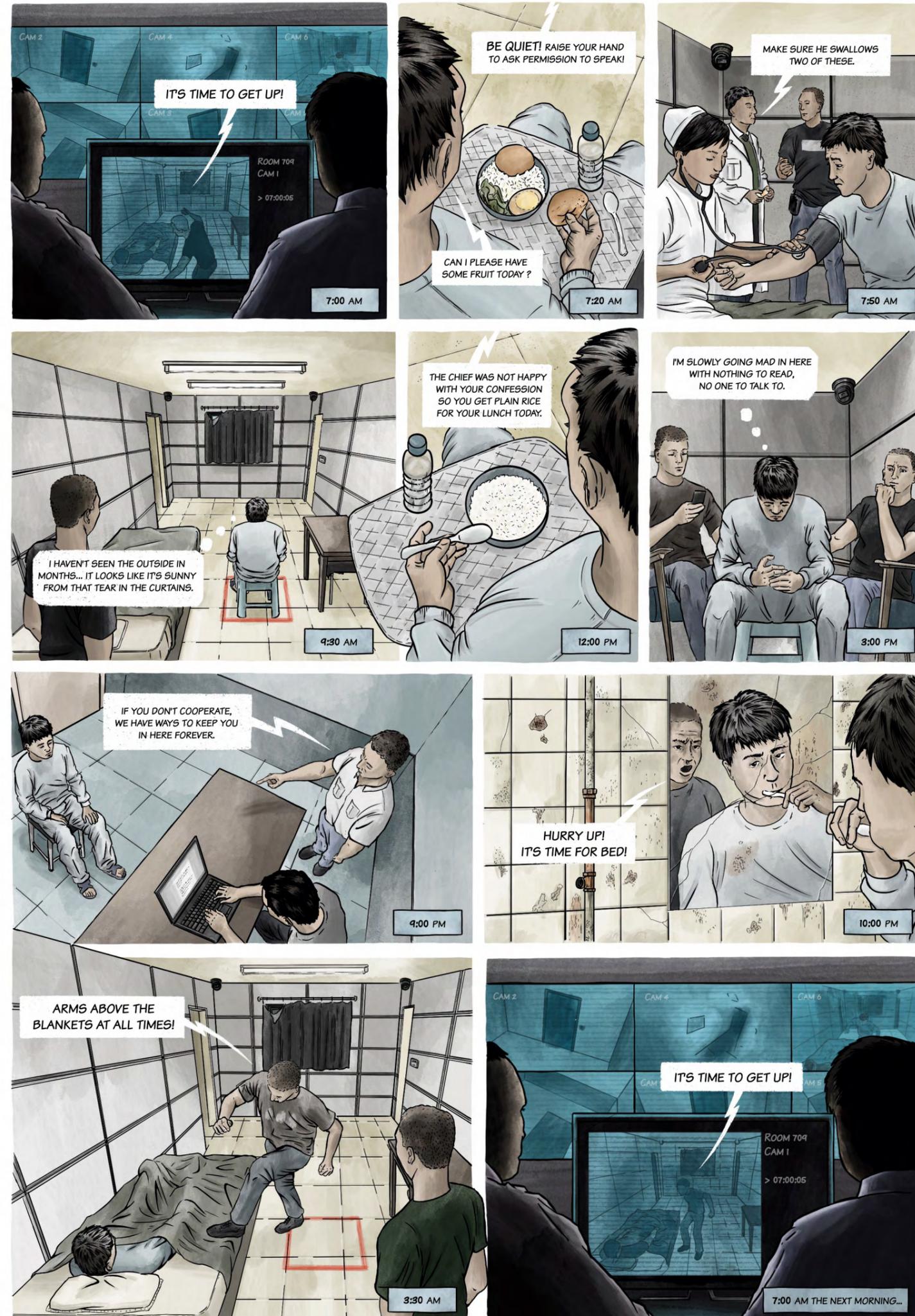
You can count the hours by the rigid schedule you have to live by – get up, have breakfast, sit motionless, have lunch, sit motionless, have dinner, sit motionless, interrogation, sit motionless, sleep. Or maybe it's the changeover of the guards, every two to six hours, that helps you make sense of time. Naturally, the air gets very stuffy with the window clamped shut for months. Showers are granted infrequently.

There are countless rules to obey: never talk to the guards, always sleep with your arms above the blankets, take all medicine that is given to you, raise your hand if you want to request something. If you anger your interrogators—maybe your confession isn't contrite enough, maybe you won't sign something they've demanded you sign—you might be punished with reduced rations, a blow to the stomach, a spell with shackles.

You are watched not only by the guards (who report your every move into a walkie talkie and note it down into a little notebook) but half a dozen surveillance cameras that capture the entire room, sometimes, including the bathroom, as if to deny you even the tiniest scrap of dignity. The guards, who are given padded armchairs, sit close and on either side of you. When they're not staring at you, they're scrolling through their phones.

The boredom will be excruciating. Even the prospect of an interrogation will appeal at those times. To relieve the ennui, ease the fear and pain and block out the incessant brainwashing efforts, you will eavesdrop on the guards' gossip, remember past snatches of songs or passages from books and go over them again and again and again in your head. Memories, past conversations and encounters may play like a movie in your mind. Some victims mull suicide but your captors have made that impossible – hard surfaces like the walls and edges of desks will be padded, the guards watch you like a hawk anyway and you'll never get a chance to try, even if there was a way.

**Illustration on page 17:** Under constant surveillance in a cell with no sunlight, victims have their time strictly regimented into sleeping, eating, sitting and interrogations. There are no mirrors in RSDL, the one here is included for artistic reasons only. Artwork by Antlem.



The first half of your RSDL term will be characterized by intense daily interrogations that may last hours. Often these occur in your room or in an interrogation room in the same building. To crush your spirit and coerce a confession, you may be subjected to excruciating stress positions that have to be held for hours (see page 33). Treatment often improves during the second half of the RSDL

term: interrogations dwindle or even stop altogether, you might be allowed some limited exercise such as walking around your room, and if you're very lucky, in the final weeks you might be given some books to read. By this stage, the police have everything they need from you and the extra time is presumably used to process your arrest or release.

**Illustration on page 19:** In RSDL, guards watch and record your actions 24 hours a day, whether you are asleep, awake, or even in the bathroom. This prisoner logbook is an artist's interpretation based on victim testimonies. Designed by Sandra Soler Peyton.

## Prisoner Logbook

Date: 27 January 2021

Cell No: 302

Time	Item	Comments
7AM	Wake inmate. Bring toothbrush in. Allow 5 mins bathroom time.	Inmate 302 requested shower. Denied.
7:15AM to 7:45AM	Breakfast	Nothing to note.
7:45AM to 8AM	Medical checkup. Ensure inmate swallows all medication	Blood pressure still high, everything else normal. Inmate 302 resisted taking medication. As punishment, today's exercise time is withdrawn.
8AM to noon	Forced sitting. Inmate must remain on stool. Do not allow any movement	Inmate 302 asks for window to be opened. Denied.
Noon to 12:30PM	Lunch	Nothing to note.
12:30PM to 2PM	Midday nap. Send inmate to bed. Allow toilet break	Inmate 302 does not sleep. Stares at ceiling.
2PM to 2:15PM	Exercise time. Confine inmate to marked area	Permission withdrawn (see above)
2:15PM to 6PM	Forced sitting. Inmate must remain on stool. Do not allow any movement	Inmate 302 requests emergency toilet break. Vomits. Will notify doctor at medical checkup tomorrow.
6PM to 6:30PM	Dinner	Inmate 302 eats only half of the food.
6:30PM to 8PM	Forced sitting. Inmate must remain on stool. Do not allow any movement	Inmate 302 looks pale and listless.
8PM to 11pm (or later if extended interrogation)	Take inmate to interrogation	Nothing to note.
11pm (or later if extended interrogation)	Collect inmate from interrogation. Bring toothbrush in. Allow 5 minutes bathroom time. Inmate to bed	INMATE 302 LOOKS DAZED AND WEAK. AGAIN REQUESTS SHOWER DENIED BUT PUT IN REQUEST FOR SHOWER THIS WEEK AS SKIN GRIMY.
11PM to 7AM	Ensure arms above blankets	Woke inmate 302 twice as arms under blankets.

I found myself in a room surrounded by soft-padded walls, with a single bed, a table, two chairs, and four or five young uniformed female guards standing around me. An older one faced me and demanded in a stern voice that I take off all my clothes for inspection and change into the clothes and slippers they had prepared for me in advance.

**LI QIAOCHU**

Whenever they made me take medicine, the guards would come over and they would make sure that I swallowed the pills. They didn't want me to hide them and then take them all in one go in a suicide attempt.

**LIU SIXIN**

In the next two months, in addition to my medications, I learned to vomit after meals as a method of release from my fear and pain.

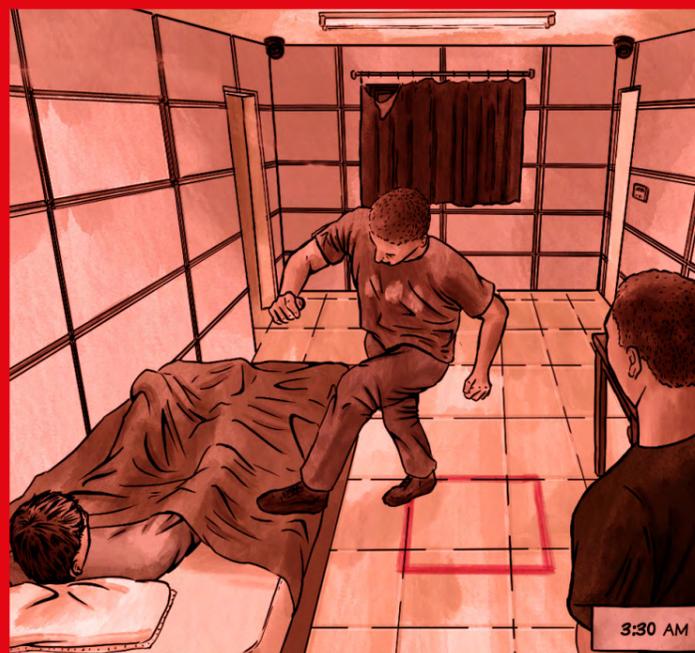
**LI QIAOCHU**

Books or things to read were never given. I was to suffer from a lack of distractions... Looking into the blue-grayish suicide padding, each minute would feel like an hour, part of the tactics of secret detention.

**PETER DAHLIN**

The bathroom was covered with cameras monitoring me and I could hear the guards in the other room talking about me while they watched. The humiliation was constant.

**CHEN ZHIXU**



After it snowed, the sun would come out. I could hear magpies singing outside the window.

**LIU SIXIN**

I was told to take off all my clothes, squatted and stretched out my arms and feet for examination. Then I changed into prisoner top, orange in colour, and cotton sweat pants in cement-like colour. What crime have I committed? As my glasses were taken from me...I was directing my question at people with blurred faces. Again I got no reply.

**LAM WING-KEE**

I had maggots under my bed [a mattress on the floor]. For the most part, the guards would not speak to me at all. But the younger guards would.

**JEFF HARPER**

The curtains were always drawn to block out the sunlight. They never opened them except once to let in some air.

**CHEN ZHIXU**

At night, two guards watched me, even when I went to the toilet or brushed my teeth. One would stand inside the bathroom, and another by the door. One of them had a small book in his pocket. Every 10 minutes, he would take it out and make notes. My daily routine was entirely regimented, except for the interrogations.

**BAO LONGJUN**

The two comfortable chairs in my cell were usually taken up by teams of two guards. In six-hour shifts, 24 hours a day, they would sit there, staring at me, taking notes on any little thing, but not speaking.

**PETER DAHLIN**

The door opened. 7 a.m. Shift change. Notebooks changed hands and Guard 4 brought breakfast on a metal tray with sections. She instructed me to face the wall and eat. I swallowed the bland rice congee so the Guard 5 could write, Julia ate breakfast.

**JULIA GARRATT**

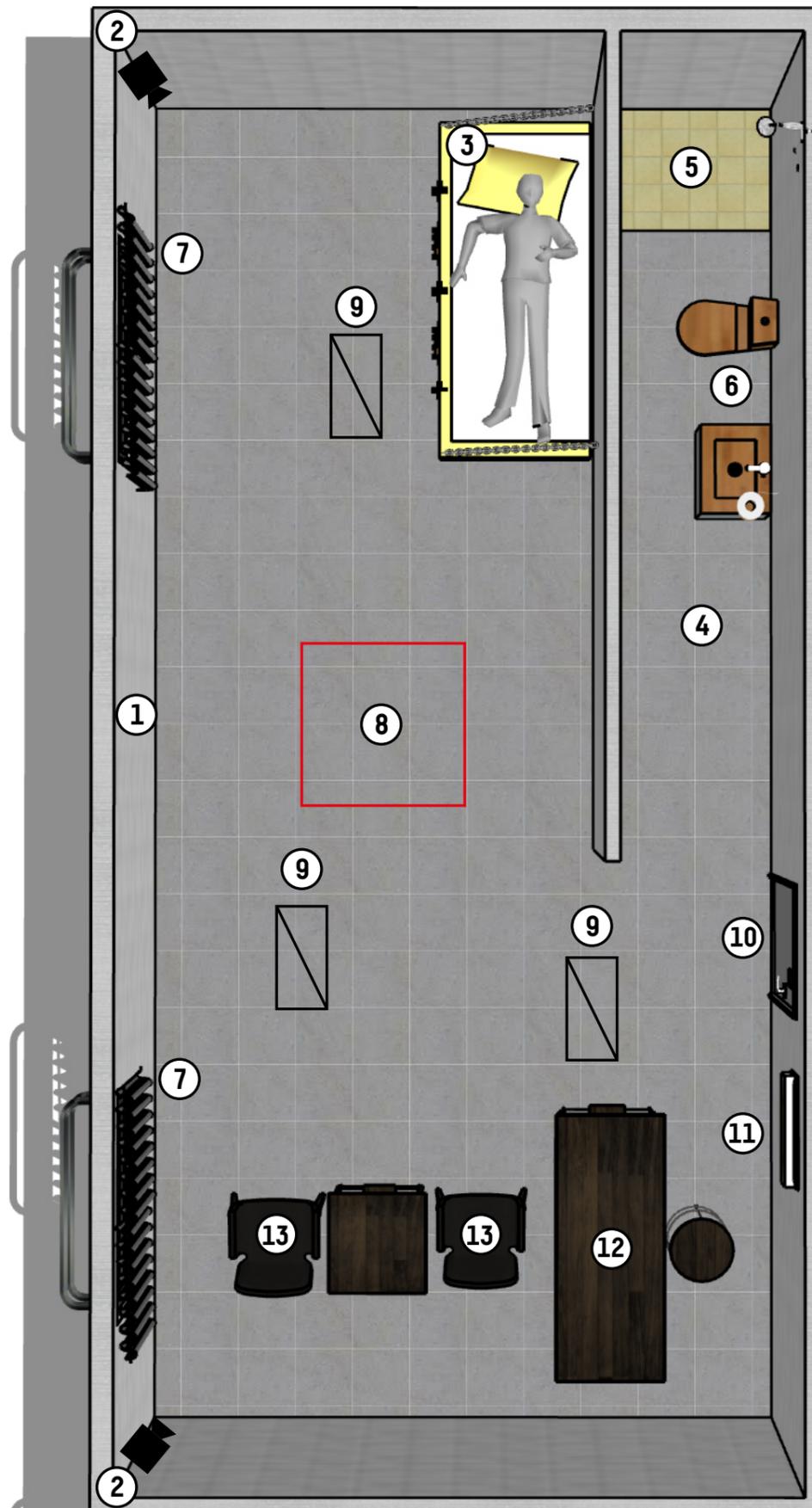
The fluorescent light in the room was lit 24 hours. I was not allowed to shower, and to brush my teeth... When I was not interrogated, I had to sit on the mattress. They put a black hood over my head whenever I was brought out to the hallway or to use the bathroom.

**DING JIAXI**



I ate rice every day. Sometimes the rice had bugs in it.... I lost 40lbs.

**JEFF HARPER**



- ① Anti-suicide padded walls
- ② Surveillance cameras
- ③ Bed with thin blankets
- ④ Basic bathroom - no mirror, toiletries brought in by guard when used
- ⑤ Shower - rarely allowed
- ⑥ Toilet & sink with anti-suicide padding
- ⑦ Thick drapes kept closed
- ⑧ Square drawn on floor to show prisoner's allow movement
- ⑨ Bright fluorescent strip lights, always on
- ⑩ Door locked with keycard
- ⑪ Digital clock & thermometer, taped over so prisoner cannot see the temperature
- ⑫ Table & stool for prisoner
- ⑬ Armchairs for guards while watching prisoner

**Illustration on page 22:** 3-D rendering of a cell at a custom-built Ministry of State Security-run RSDL facility, based on the experiences of several victims, including Peter Dahlin, who was held here in January 2016. Artwork by Sachira.

**Illustration on page 25:** Some RSDL victims report being given a list of rules to read, others are told verbally. This list of RSDL Prisoner Rules is an artist's interpretation based on victim testimonies. Designed by Sandra Soler Peyton.

Your cell will depend on your RSDL facility - it may be purpose built or it may just be an old apartment bedroom or guesthouse room. It might be very large and bare or barely bigger than the area of a double bed.<sup>9</sup> But several features remain common to all RSDL, whatever the building type.

Furniture will be sparse: a bed for you, two padded chairs for the guards to sit and watch you, and a simple chair or stool for you to while away the hours every day. The guards might draw a small square on the floor tiles, maybe 1m<sup>2</sup> in which you will be ordered to stay, standing or sitting. If the police, illegally, decide to interrogate you in your cell, there will also be a table and chairs.

Everything will be suicide proofed. The walls will be covered in greyish padding or yellow-plastic covered foam, and sometimes the hard corners of the table, the bed, the sink and the toilet will also be encased in soft material. You may even be provided with a suicide-proofed toothbrush - the handle rounded like a golf ball or a cord tied to it with the other end firmly in the grip of a guard - aimed at preventing you from swallowing it. There are no mirrors in the room or the bathroom; all sharp objects are potential weapons with which you might harm the guards or yourself.

Of course, there is little chance of you committing suicide even without all these measures because you will be watched every second of every day. At least two guards will be posted in your room to record your every movement, and a stack of surveillance cameras attached to the ceiling of your cell and perhaps also, the bathroom, will be pointing at you 24 hours a day.

The walls will be blank, except, for a police notice or a list of rules. They may play with your mind by keeping the room at uncomfortable temperatures - the heat turned up to make it sweltering or the windows flung open behind the thick drapes to let in the frigid winter air. Your bedding will be some thin blankets at best. If you are in a custom-built facility, they might attach a digital clock and temperature reader on the wall and then tape inexplicably over the temperature display.

You will not be allowed to keep any possessions, so there is no need for any cupboards or drawers. Eating utensils are removed after each meal. When it's time to brush your teeth, the guards will bring toiletry supplies in. Showers will only be granted infrequently and timed. Perhaps there is only cold water, and you will be ordered to come out before you've even washed out the suds.

To maintain the secrecy behind the location, and to add extra psychological pressure, the cell's window will be blacked out. The glass may be frosted over or thick curtains will obscure any view. Rest assured, even if you could open the drapes, sturdy bars will encase the frame. You will not see sunlight for your entire RSDL term, which could be six months (and even - illegally - longer). Instead, the room will be lit by harsh fluorescent strip lights, night and day. Perhaps you might be lucky and catch a glimpse of something through a tiny overlooked gap in the curtains - a patch of sky, the corner of a building, or you may be able to sneak a look through the grille in the tiny bathroom window, if it has any. You might take hope by the sight of a bird or the sound of children playing at a school in the distance.

## RSDL Prisoner Rules

Regulations governing the behaviour of all inmates at [REDACTED] Police Guesthouse RSDL facility. Inmates who break any of the below regulations will face strict disciplinary action.

- Obey guards' orders without exception
- Do not speak with the guards unless spoken to first (unless there is a medical emergency)
- Raise your hand to ask permission to use the bathroom or make other requests
- Do not move around the room without permission from the guards
- If permitted to walk, stay within the designated area. Stay clear of windows and walls, move slowly
- Sleep on your back and keep both arms above the blanket at all times
- Cooperate with medical staff and take all medicine that is prescribed
- Food provided must be eaten. Hunger strikers will not be tolerated
- Cooperate with all requests for information and for written and recorded material from investigating officers
- Inmates who break any of the above rules will be punished. Penalties, include, but are not limited to, reduced rations, loss of access to exercise time, extension of RSDL duration

27 January 2021



I would just sit around all day and do push-ups and work out. Stare out the window and look at the airplanes go by and hoping that this day would pass... I had one form of entertainment. It was a big rat crawling from wire to wire between the buildings. I watched this rat every day.

**JEFF HARPER**

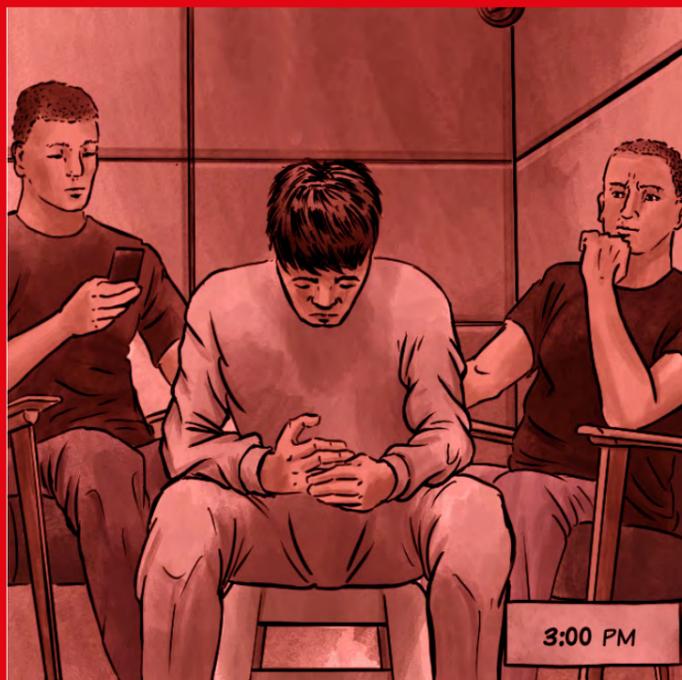
It went on like that. I was forced to stay inside the small painted square during the day, suffering at the hands of these young girls. If my leg or a foot were out of the square, even by just a tiny bit, they would warn me or slap me.

**WANG YU**



The walls were specially designed, padded for sound insulation and suicide prevention. There was an interrogation table, a big-screen television, speakers, a computer, and cameras in the room. There was a digital clock, displaying the date and time.

**CHEN ZHIXU**



I gradually learned the 'rules' that needed to be obeyed at a 'residential surveillance centre': always obey orders given by guards; raise your hand to report any issue you have, and then security guards will report to higher-ups via walkie-talkies, and you can only do anything when permission is given; talking to guards is forbidden... you will be monitored by guards even when you go to the toilet or take a shower.

**LI QIAOCHU**

Neither man has seen sunlight, breathed fresh air or seen so much as a tree or patch of grass.

**MICHAEL SPAVOR & MICHAEL KOVRIG**

One man announced the daily schedule for me and informed me that the next day I was to study the prison rules and regulations posted on the wall.

**XIE YANYI**

Sometimes I gave the excuse of using the toilet and tip-toed on the raised step of the squatting toilet to look outside. I counted 20 big windows on the opposite building. It had 5-storeys, probably the same for the building where I was. There were a few more buildings on the right. If there was no mist, I could see the top of several hills.

**LAM WING-KEE**

"No talking!" "No moving without permission!" "Raise your hand if you want to say anything!" "Sleep with your clothes on!" "Put your hands on top of the blanket!" "Don't put your hands inside the blanket!" "Don't sleep on your stomach!" "Don't sleep on your side!"

**TANG ZHISHUN**

Two female guards with plastic tags identifying them as numbers, stood beside me as one locked the door. Footsteps faded as the others left. Two long fluorescent lights hung from the ceiling. The small bare room had a bed, bedside table, one hard chair, and a bathroom with a hole instead of a door handle. Along one white wall was an old worn couch for the guards with a small white clock perched on the back cushion, its ticking punctuating the silence.

**JULIA GARRATT**

On the wall opposite the bed were two big cameras, one on the left, and one on the right. It was like the eyes of "Big Brother" in 1984. Any small action I took would not escape Big Brother's eyes.

**SUI MUQING**

# THE INTERROGATION ROOM

You might be interrogated in your cell, or you may be taken to another room. The law stipulates that RSDL detainees should be questioned at a different location to that of their residential surveillance, but for rights defenders, this is rarely observed.

For the first few weeks or even months of RSDL, interrogations may last for hours. At the very beginning you may be interrogated until exhaustion. You might collapse under the strain.

Your interrogators will be in plainclothes and they will refuse to reveal their identities. They may let you sit in a normal chair, or you may be shackled and bolted into a tiger chair. This torture device has a plate that goes over your thighs and wrist and ankle restraints.

In order to grab opportune footage for "televised confessions", in addition to the

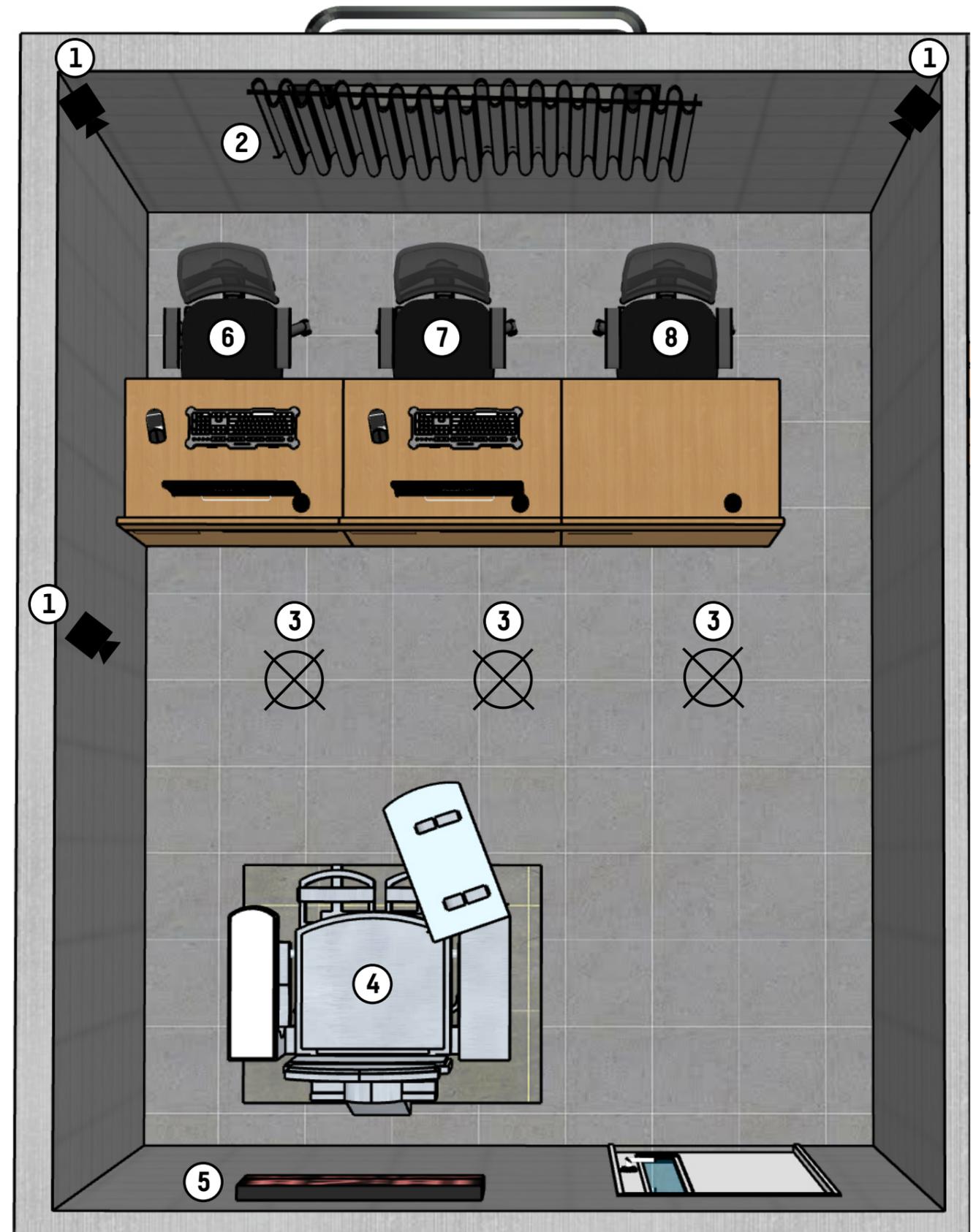
security cameras ringing the room, one of the interrogators may train a web cam on you from their laptop. You may be coerced into signing away your rights to a lawyer (although your chances of seeing one in RSDL are near zero), writing a self-criticism or letter of repentance, or recording a police-scripted confession, which may then be shown on national television.

While the interrogations may break up the monotony of your RSDL prison life, they are also when you are most likely to be tortured and threatened. If you're female, you may also be subjected to sexual harassment and humiliation.

Towards the end of your RSDL imprisonment, interrogations may dwindle and even stop. The police have likely got everything they wanted out of you and are now considering what to do: release you on bail or formally arrest you and transfer you to a detention centre.

- ① Surveillance cameras
- ② Thick drapes kept closed
- ③ Spotlights for blinding prisoner
- ④ Tiger chair
- ⑤ Digital clock with date
- ⑥ Chair for officer taking notes
- ⑦ Chair for interrogator
- ⑧ Chair for interpreter or second interrogator

**Illustration on page 29:** 3-D rendering of an interrogation room at a custom-built Ministry of State Security-run RSDL facility, based on the experiences of victims, including Peter Dahlin, who was held here in January 2016. Artwork by Sachira.



'Confess you were on assignment for CSIS. Julia confessed yesterday,' threatened Captain, and taking my hesitation as a lack of cooperation added, 'Maybe you prefer eight years in prison, or execution? Or transfer to North Korea? Your treatment there will be far worse.'

**KEVIN GARRATT**



I was not allowed to wear underwear, and whenever I was confronted by male interrogators I would always subconsciously make sure that my clothes were not clinging to my body... Officer Li would occasionally say things that were sexually humiliating.

**LI QIAOCHU**

Going between the interrogation room and the cell, [Xu] was hooded with a black sack and made to wear a heavy motorcycle helmet.

**XU ZHIYONG**

The female officer made fun of me, attacking me for my dishevelled appearance and trying other ways to shame me into cooperating. As I was restrained and surrounded, she could have probably said anything for this kind of verbal attack to have an emotional impact. But it didn't change the fact that I knew nothing. But they didn't want honesty, just a confession.

**PAN JINLING**

At 8 or 9 in the evening, two girls carried in an interrogation chair. The chair was covered in white painted steel, with a steel strap across the midsection. They placed the chair in between my square and the table and told me the interrogator was coming.

**WANG YU**

During the interrogation sessions, if I didn't say what they wanted to hear, they would punish me. For example, they might not allow me to blink my eyes. They might force me to sit for long periods on the criminal's [tiger] chair, or force me to stand in my cell for the whole day, even when I was too weak to stand and would repeatedly fall down.

**TANG ZHISHUN**

After I delivered my confession, sometimes I wouldn't see the investigators for days on end. I felt extremely bored because I could only sit in the room and daydream. Once, a police officer inadvertently left two pages of newspaper behind. I could recite almost everything on those pages, even the advertisements.

**SUI MUQING**

Previous reports of Yang's interrogations suggest he has been repeatedly told he faces execution, that his country has abandoned him, and his family and friends have betrayed him.

**YANG HENGJUN**

My interrogations weren't held in a special room; they would hold them in my cell instead.

**ZHAI YANMIN**



## Chapter 7: Ways to Persuade

### The Dangling Stool

Order inmate to stay seated for required time. Prohibit all movement. Ensure feet do not touch the floor and back is kept straight.

Note: This method will quickly induce pain in the buttocks, back and legs. Inmate may be unable to walk or go to the toilet for several hours afterwards.



### Intimidation

Threaten inmate's loved ones and family members. Threats may range from disrupting schooling or career to threats of arrest or even to life. Ensure inmate knows you have the power to execute the threat.



### Invisible Beating

Inflict kicks and punches to the chest, stomach and back of the inmate. Do not cause wounds to visible areas of the body such as the face, hands and legs. May first take inmate into the bathroom to avoid surveillance cameras if necessary.



You are now in RSDL. You are alone. Except for your guards and interrogators, no one knows where you are. There is no oversight. No accountability. You are entirely helpless.

This is the perfect environment for the police to inflict physical and psychological tortures to get you to cooperate with them. Their aim is to coerce a confession and RSDL has been custom designed and refined to give them maximum powers to do just that. Here are just a few of the many approaches they might adopt to break you.

Working in shifts, a team of interrogators may lock you into a tiger chair and subject you to extended interrogations that could last for days and nights until you collapse. They may deprive you of food, give you reduced rations and water, deny you medical treatment, or deny or delay access to your essential regular medications.

You might be forced to sit on the dangling stool: either a tall custom-made stool with extra-long legs, several plastic stools stacked on top of each other, or a pile of blocks. The point is to ensure your feet don't reach the floor so your entire weight is carried by your buttocks and lower back. You will be ordered not to move for five, eight, ten, maybe even 16 hours, after which you will be in so much pain that you might not be able to walk.

They could, instead, force you to wear a combined shackles and handcuffs device, so that you are chained up day and night for days or weeks. You will only be able to shuffle bent over. Even sleeping is painful.

Your interrogators and guards won't be shy to beat you up every now and again, if they're angry. They are careful though, they won't leave any visible marks, usually restricting their punches to your abdomen and back and avoiding the face and lower limbs. If there are no cameras in the bathroom, they may move you in there to prevent any accidental video evidence of their violence. Instead of their fists, they might use electric batons.

Your daily medical check-ups may also include forced medication with unknown drugs. Don't think about pretending to take them, the guards will watch you closely, or stuff them in your mouth and force you to swallow them. These mysterious drugs might make your brain foggy, your mind dull, your muscles hurt and even cause your vision to go blurred, among other side effects.<sup>10</sup>

If you are female, there is the extra danger of sexual humiliation or harassment. You may be verbally shamed, asked to strip naked, threatened with sexual violence, and even worse.

Police are adept at psychological torture in RSDL. They may threaten to keep you for years in these conditions, even kill you. But what might break you in the end are the threats they may level at your loved ones and family. These may range from threats of harassment; forcing them from their job, their school, their home; arrest; to actual physical harm and even death. The asymmetry of power in RSDL between the police and you, means their threats carry weight and thus, are truly horrifying.

**Illustration on page 32:** This page, from the imagined *An RSDL Interrogator's Handbook*, depicts physical and mental tortures carried out on prisoners based on victim testimonies. Artwork by Antlem.

I was forced to write 'confessions' on a few hundred pages of A4 paper... I was forced to make up and fabricate things that are non-existent... When failing to do so, I was allowed to eat nothing but rice, I was deprived of sleep, and I was hung up and beaten. Between December 10, 2019, and January 20, 2020, I slept less than 30 hours in total, and I was crippled by beating.

**NIU TENGJU**

Because I spent so much time sitting in the same position, the muscles in my legs atrophied, and it was hard to walk after I was released.

**LI QIAOCHU**



Far worse than the physical mistreatment was the mental anguish I suffered. At times they warned me that my wife and child, despite being in the United States, were not as safe as I might think they were. They could still kill them. They said the same about my mother and sister.

**TANG ZHISHUN**

I sat on the stool for the whole day. The stool was quite tall, so my feet didn't reach the ground. The only way they could touch was if I perched on the very end.

**LIU SIXIN**

I was tortured in so many ways. They cuffed my hands behind my back, they locked me to iron railings, they would use five or six electric batons to beat me. For a long time, they didn't let me eat, drink water or go to the bathroom. They subjected me to so many kinds of torture. Yet, it was nothing compared with their threats that they would detain my son.

**ZHAI YANMIN**

He was held... in a windowless basement room furnished with padded walls. For those 10 consecutive days, 24 hours a day, he was chained to a tiger bench. He wailed in desperation when he could no longer bear the pain from his grossly swollen legs.

**CHANG WEIPING**

There is nothing they won't do to get what they want. For example, they showed me photos of my newborn daughter, videos of my son in class and playing the horsehead fiddle; and they threatened to detain my wife, Yuan Shanshan. That nearly broke me.

**XIE YANYI**

When he failed to answer their questions the way they wanted, his interrogators would fly into a rage. They would drag his body from the stools, and fling him into a corner of the room outside the range of the surveillance cameras. With one officer holding his arms, another would kick, punch and knee him. But they were always careful to avoid leaving visible marks; they spared his face and concentrated on delivering their blows to his body. At other times, Xie was hung from the ceiling and beaten. He lost consciousness at one point...

**XIE YANG**

Early on the fifth or sixth morning of sleep deprivation, the tiredness started to hit me. My consciousness felt vague, followed by a pain I felt all over my body. It was like being roasted by a fire, while at the same time feeling extremely cold. It was a kind of pain that I had never experienced before. Faintly, I felt that I was dying.

**SUI MUQING**



That monster grabbed my hands and feet, and handcuffed and shackled me. The handcuffs were not the normal type, but designed specifically for torture, made of pure pig iron, with tough 1cm thick rings. My wrists became swollen after wearing them for a day, and even more than one year later my wrists still look a little black...

**WANG YU**

# PART THREE: RELEASE

*No one even knows if you're alive or dead.  
In the process, abuse and torture are inevitable.*

Xie Yanyi, human rights lawyer

The day will finally come when your RSDL nightmare will end.

There will be signs that this is imminent. Maybe you were coerced into writing a confession document that pleased the officers. Your interrogations have dwindled to nothing, your treatment begins to improve a little (more and better food, something to read is provided). In the days before you leave, you will need to sign some paperwork - likely an agreement that you will not disclose details of your RSDL imprisonment to media. If you are going to be formally arrested, they will likely force you to sign over any right to be represented by a lawyer of your choice.

In politically-motivated RSDL cases involving foreigners and hostage diplomacy, the timing of your RSDL will be synchronized to the hour that will have the greatest impact on the target country. They may suddenly announce your arrest, remove you from RSDL, and transfer you to a detention centre.<sup>11</sup>

If officers are not able to scabble any evidence against you for the case, or they originally only intended your RSDL to intimidate you, at this point you will probably be released. Often, this will be Non-Release Release, essentially an extension of imprisonment, but this time under house arrest or forced travel.<sup>12</sup> Even if you are allowed to leave your home, you will likely be forced to stay within city limits, and followed and harassed by officers for weeks, months, even years to come.

If the police are pursuing your case, you will be transferred to a detention centre and formally arrested. Your name may be altered during registration, so that your family and lawyer cannot find you, effectively extending the time you remain disappeared by months, even years for some.<sup>13</sup>

Either way, it's time for the black hood again before you are finally driven out of the gates.

**Illustration on page 37:** Before release, RSDL victims report being asked to sign a paper promising not to make public their experiences under residential surveillance. This RSDL release letter is an artist's interpretation based on victim testimonies. Designed by Sandra Soler Peyton.

## RSDL Release Letter of Guarantee

I, Huang Li, ID No. 510113197002152198, place of birth Chengdu, give my guarantee that following my release from Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location on 13 April 2021 I will not:

- Reveal to anyone any details concerning my case or my Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location;
- Give any interviews to media;
- Post online any details concerning my case or my Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location including social media, for example Weibo and Wechat;
- Meet with any persons connected with my case or designated to me as sensitive by the case handling officers;
- Go to any foreign mission or meet with any foreign diplomatic staff;
- Or leave Chengdu for at least six months following release date (as indicated by stamp below).

Signature: Huang Li  
Date: 12 April 2021

13 April 2021



The last day came, and I was given a paper to sign in which I had to agree not to give any interviews and some other rules to follow after I was released... [I was] blindfolded, and driven back into central Beijing.

PAN JINLING

They put handcuffs and a blindfold on me. Holding me by the arms either side, two guards walked me out of the room. Then we got into a car and drove for about an hour. I was back in a detention centre after two years.

LIU SIXIN

Every day I heard interrogations, howling, and moaning in the middle of the night in the room above me. That was when I decided that I absolutely had to control myself, find a way to get out as early as possible, and expose this torture.

XIE YANYI

In RSDL, my interrogator once said to me: 'If you die here, no one would ever know.' It's true. In RSDL, you're being detained in secret. No one knew where I was. No one knew who had taken me. No one would know if I died in RSDL. At least in a detention centre, if something happened to me, someone would have to take responsibility.

ZHAI YANMIN



In the last five days before they let me go... They prepared some papers for me to sign, forcing my fingerprints onto my confession.

CHEN ZHIXU



In the first days and weeks after release, I was fearful, high-strung, insomniac, and troubled by nightmares. I couldn't focus, had traumatic flashbacks, and my limbs shook... I spoke in whispers when seeing friends, constantly scanning around me alertly.

LI QIAOCHU

The requirements included not leaving Dandong without approval from the enforcement authority, appearing any time when summoned, not destroying or falsifying evidence or colluding with others regarding confessions, not disclosing the case to anybody, nor meeting with lawyers or accepting interviews by domestic media, and getting prior approval to meet with Canadian Embassy officials. The official security bureau seal was stamped at the bottom of this disturbing document. I signed and fingerprinted both Chinese copies.

JULIA GARRATT

Standing in line in shops became intolerable, and panic attacks mounted in almost every situation where I felt I wasn't in complete control.

PETER DAHLIN

When I reflect back on these experiences now, it's hard, and I can't imagine how I was able to handle it. Sometimes, if I think about if it were to happen a second time, I ask myself would I be able to handle it again? Perhaps this is what is meant by "secondary trauma."

WANG YU

*I will not regret having related what I went through, even if I have to pay the price of being locked up again for doing so, because I know that the moment I muster enough courage to reveal the truth, I will set myself free from the humiliation and terror with which the Guobao [political police] have tried to cloak me.*

Li Qiaochu

The wounds of physical torture may linger long after your RSDL is over. Perhaps extended periods wearing shackles have made your joints ache, or the dangling stool has damaged your spine. The effect of the mysterious medicines you were forced to take may impair your physical and mental health long into the future. The intense psychological pressure of being locked away in a secret prison for months on end will also have a long-term impact.

Because there are no genuine means for redress in China for RSDL victims, speaking out in publications like *Locked Up*, even if anonymously, can help. Victim testimony contributes to a body of evidence that can be used to raise awareness, and garner international support to exert pressure on China to withdraw this system of state-sanctioned kidnappings. It gives a name to a practice, formally denounced by UN bodies, that can distinguish it from the very many other human rights violations perpetrated by the Chinese Communist Party under Xi Jinping.

**Illustration on pages 42-43:** We have documented at least 18 cases where non-mainland Chinese people were placed into RSDL. It is likely that there are many other cases that have not been made public. Designed by Sandra Soler Peyton.

*Locked Up: China's Secret RSDL Jails* is based entirely on evidence provided by victims. Throughout the report, we have used quotes from the following list of 23 individuals, some obtained directly, others from secondary sources, who spent time in RSDL between 2015 and 2021. Unless otherwise indicated, their testimony comes from *The People's Republic of the Disappeared I* and *II* and/or interviews conducted in 2020 and 2021.

**BAO LONGJUN (包龙军)**, rights activist and husband of Wang Yu

**CHANG WEIPING (常玮平)**, human rights lawyer <sup>14</sup>

**CHEN ZHIXU (pseudonym)**, rights activist

**PETER DAHLIN**, Swedish rights activist

**JULIA GARRATT**, Canadian coffee shop owner <sup>15</sup>

**KEVIN GARRATT**, Canadian coffee shop owner <sup>16</sup>

**JEFF HARPER**, US basketball player

**DING JIAXI (丁家喜)**, human rights lawyer <sup>17</sup>

**MICHAEL KOVRIG**, former Canadian diplomat <sup>18</sup>

**LAM WING-KEE (林荣基)**, Hong Kong bookseller <sup>19</sup>

**LI QIAOCHU (李翘楚)**, rights activist <sup>20</sup>

**LIU SIXIN (刘四新)**, legal scholar

**NIU TENG YU (牛腾宇)**, coder <sup>21</sup>

**PAN JINLING (潘锦玲)**, girlfriend of Peter Dahlin

**MICHAEL SPAVOR**, Canadian businessman <sup>22</sup>

**SUI MUQING (隋牧青)**, human rights lawyer

**TANG ZHISHUN (唐志顺)**, rights activist

**WANG YU (王宇)**, human rights lawyer

**XIE YANG (谢阳)**, human rights lawyer

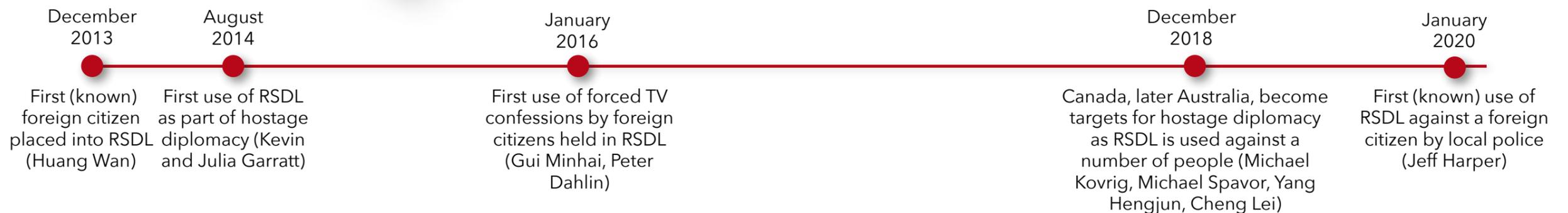
**XIE YANYI (谢燕益)**, human rights lawyer <sup>23</sup>

**XU ZHIYONG (许志永)**, rights activist <sup>24</sup>

**YANG HENGJUN (杨恒均)**, Australian writer <sup>25</sup>

**ZHAI YANMIN (翟岩民)**, rights activist

# APPENDIX II: KNOWN FOREIGN TARGETS OF CHINA'S RSDL



# REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> *Solitary confinement as torture in RSDL*. Safeguard Defenders. (2019, August 27). Accessed from: <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/use-solitary-confinement-rsdl-method-torture>.

<sup>2</sup> From our sample, we only have one case, that of US basketball player Jeff Harper, that is not a human rights defenders' case. In an interview with Safeguard Defenders in December 2020, Mr. Harper described his conditions under RSDL. They were both better and worse than those described by human rights defenders. Please see: <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/very-unusual-case-rsdl>

<sup>3</sup> Martin, L., & Kuo, L. (2019, January 24). *Yang Hengjun held in China under 'residential surveillance', say Australian officials*. The Guardian. Accessed from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/24/yang-hengjun-china-behaving-like-terrorists-says-friend-of-detained-australian>.

<sup>4</sup> China Yurun Food Group founder and largest shareholder Zhu Yicai disappeared between 2015 and 2019. While it is not clear that he spent the entire time in RSDL, since part of it may have been spent in Residential Surveillance, which is carried out at the suspect's home. Please see: <https://www.straitstimes.com/business/companies-markets/china-meat-boss-returns-home-after-mysterious-disappearance-3-years-ago>

<sup>5</sup> Please see (in Chinese): <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/北京市保安服务总公司>

<sup>6</sup> VanderKlippe, N., & Chase, S. (2021, February 8). *Canada's visa application centre in Beijing run by Chinese police*. The Globe and Mail. Accessed from: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-canadas-visa-application-centre-in-beijing-run-by-chinese-police/>

<sup>7</sup> Safeguard Defenders' 2020 report, *Rampant Repression*, analysed official RSDL detention data. Please see: <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/rampant-repression-30000-disappeared-china-s-rsdl-jails-2013>

<sup>8</sup> For example, several of the 709 Crackdown victims were first held in a Beijing RSDL facility, then later moved to a Tianjin RSDL facility.

<sup>9</sup> Victims have reported being locked up in spaces as big as 100m<sup>2</sup> (Wang Yu), to barely bigger than a double mattress (Jeff Harper).

<sup>10</sup> Sudworth, J. (2017, May 13). *Chinese lawyer 'wore torture device for a month'*. BBC News. Accessed from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-39893359>.

<sup>11</sup> China announced the formal arrest of Canadians Michaels Kovrig and Spavor five months in to their RSDL detentions, just hours after the US banned local telecom companies from purchasing equipment from companies deemed a national security threat, with Huawei one of those blacklisted. Please see: <https://chinalawandpolicy.com/tag/rsdl/>

<sup>12</sup> Non-Release Release is explained in the 2021 report by Safeguard Defenders' *Access Denied 2: China's False Freedoms* and can be downloaded here: [https://safeguarddefenders.com/sites/default/files/pdf/ACCESS%20DENIED%20%232%20ENGLISH%20FINAL%20VERSION%20FULL\\_0.pdf](https://safeguarddefenders.com/sites/default/files/pdf/ACCESS%20DENIED%20%232%20ENGLISH%20FINAL%20VERSION%20FULL_0.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> The use of fake names is covered in the 2020 report by Safeguard Defenders' *Access Denied 1: China's Vanishing Suspects* and can be downloaded here: [https://safeguarddefenders.com/sites/default/files/pdf/ACCESS\\_DENIED\\_%231\\_SGL\\_EN.pdf](https://safeguarddefenders.com/sites/default/files/pdf/ACCESS_DENIED_%231_SGL_EN.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> *China: Incommunicado detention of human rights lawyer Chang Weiping: Joint Statement*. Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada. (2020, November 13). Accessed from: <https://www.lrwc.org/china-chinese-authorities-placing-human-rights-lawyer-chang-weiping-under-residential-surveillance-joint-statement/> & from an essay by Chang's wife Chen Zijuan. Please see: <https://chinachange.org/2021/04/15/a-nights-stay-at-baotai-hotel-the-place-where-my-husband-chang-weiping-was-tortured/>

<sup>15</sup> Garratt, J., & Garratt, K. (2018). *Two tears on the window: a true story*. Julia & Kevin Garratt

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Prominent Human Rights Activist Ding Jiayi Tells Lawyer Details of Torture Throughout His Year in Custody*. China Change. (2021, February 9). Accessed from: <https://chinachange.org/2021/02/05/prominent-human-rights-activist-ding-jiayi-tells-lawyer-details-of-torture-throughout-his-year-in-custody/>

<sup>18</sup> Hopper, T. (2021, March 19). No sunlight, a hole for a toilet: What two years in Chinese detention has been like for the two Michaels. Nationalpost. Accessed from: <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/no-sunlight-a-hole-for-a-toilet-what-two-years-in-chinese-detention-has-been-like-for-the-two-michaels>

<sup>19</sup> Lam, W.K. (2017, May 3). *My Testimony regarding the "Causeway Bay Books" event*. Accessed from: <https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/CECC%20Hearing%20-%203May17%20-%20Hong%20Kong%20-%20Lam%20Wing%20Kee.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Li, Q.C. (2021, January 14). *120 Days in Secret Detention*. China Change. <https://chinachange.org/2021/01/12/120-days-in-secret-detention/>

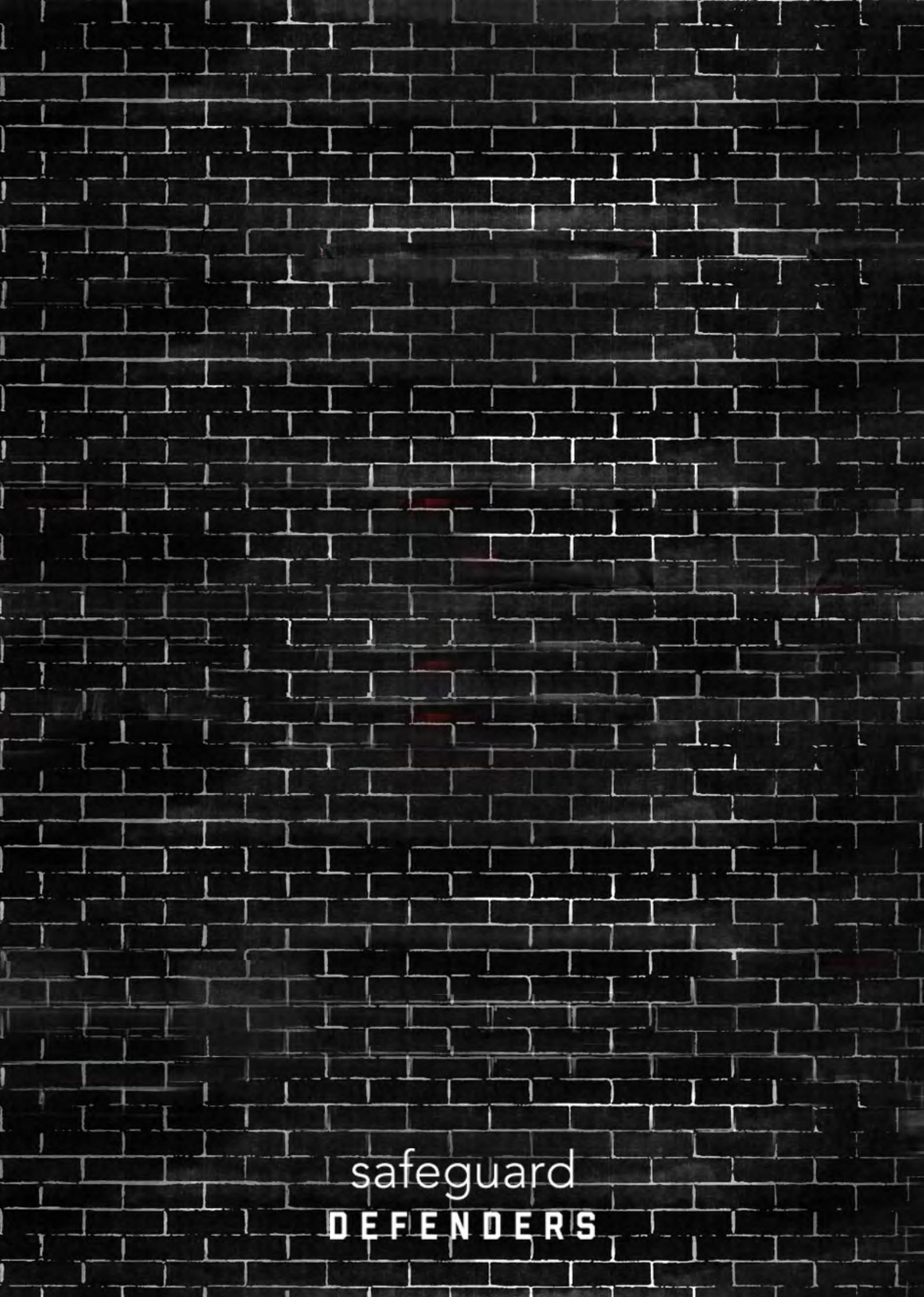
<sup>21</sup> In China, 24 Members of a Subculture Website Sentenced, the Main 'Culprit' Gets 14 Years in Prison. (2021, February 9). China Change. Accessed from: <https://chinachange.org/2021/02/03/24-members-of-a-subculture-website-sentenced-the-main-culprit-gets-14-years-in-prison/>

<sup>22</sup> Hopper, T. (2021, March 19). No sunlight, a hole for a toilet: What two years in Chinese detention has been like for the two Michaels. Nationalpost. Accessed from: <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/no-sunlight-a-hole-for-a-toilet-what-two-years-in-chinese-detention-has-been-like-for-the-two-michaels>

<sup>23</sup> A Record of 709. (2017, November 14). China Change. Accessed from: <https://chinachange.org/2017/10/15/a-record-of-709/>

<sup>24</sup> Provided by Liang Xiaojun, Xu's lawyer following a rare meeting with his client. Please see: <https://chinachange.org/2021/02/08/prominent-dissident-xu-zhiyong-met-with-lawyer-after-one-year-in-detention/>

<sup>25</sup> Doherty, B. (2019, December 2). *Yang Hengjun: Chinese officials try to "break" Australian writer with daily interrogations*. The Guardian. Accessed from: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/02/yang-hengjun-chinese-officials-try-to-break-australian-writer-with-daily-interrogations>.



safeguard  
**DEFENDERS**