

SCRIPTED AND STAGED

Behind the scenes of China's forced TV confessions



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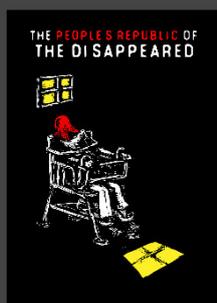
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The People's Republic of the Disappeared, the first book on the subject of China's use of Enforced Disappearances through the legalized system euphemistically named Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location (RSDL), exposes the systematic use of secret imprisonment and torture of lawyers, media workers and government critics. The book, released to widespread praise for its powerful victim testimonies, is available in both paperback and kindle editions through Amazon worldwide (ISBN 978-0999370605).



《失踪人民共和国》是有史以来第一本关于中国通过合法化的制度，婉转地将强迫失踪命名为指定居所监视居住（简称RSDL）进行使用的书籍。揭露了中国对律师、媒体工作者和政府异议人士进行秘密关押和酷刑的系统化滥用。本书自发布后，书中生动的受害者证言收到了广泛的赞誉。实体书可在Amazon全球 (ISBN 099937060X)上找到，或上RSDLmonitor.com下载PDF免费版。

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“It is difficult to explain, why I went on television, what kind of mental process I had gone through. And until now, I still feel it is difficult to describe, I don’t know how to talk about it. Actually, I do want to talk about it in detail, but I always feel sad. I am still struggling to get over the trauma. But I know I should speak out, even if just in this simple way.”

Wang Yu, human rights lawyer

The use of televised confessions of detainees by the Chinese state came to the world’s attention in July 2013 when the first high-profile confession was aired: Liang Hong, a top executive for British pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline in China, appeared on state broadcaster CCTV and confessed to bribery. Despite violating both domestic law on the right to a fair trial and many international human rights protections, since then scores of high-profile forced confessions, **including many by foreign nationals**, have been broadcast on Chinese state television and, in some cases, by Hong Kong media.

Scripted and Staged: Behind the scenes of China’s forced TV confessions analyses the recordings of 45 confessions broadcast between 2013 and 2018 and includes interviews with a dozen people or members of their family, who Chinese police had made, or had tried to make, give a confession on camera. These confessions are made before trial and often even before formal arrest. This report will show that China’s televised confessions are routinely forced and extracted through threats, torture, and fear; that police routinely dictate and direct the confessions; and that there is strong evidence that in certain cases they are used as tools of propaganda for both domestic audiences and as part of China’s foreign policy.

Every single interviewee for this study said their interrogators had forced them to confess. Further, the fact that it would be broadcast on television was generally concealed from them. In one of the worst cases of deception, British investigator Peter Humphrey had agreed to meet with newspaper reporters only but was then drugged and locked into a cage for state television to film a confession. Police regularly used threats (both towards the detainees as well as against their family members) and physical and mental torture to produce a state of fear in order to coerce the confession. Of the 37 people who appeared in televised confessions analysed in this study, five of them publicly retracted their confession and many others have done so anonymously to researchers working on *Scripted and Staged*.

The interviewees described how the police took charge of the confession from dressing them in “costume;” writing the confession “script” and forcing the detainee to memorise it; giving directions on how to “deliver” their lines—including in one case, being told to weep; to ordering retake after retake when not satisfied with the result. One interviewee said he spent seven hours recording for what amounted to just a few minutes of broadcast. Efforts to direct the confessions could also be seen in how the 45 broadcasts in this study came in two “formats”: one, filmed at a type of detention centre and another, more popular after 2015, that was recorded in a civilian and seemingly less threatening setting. In many cases, media that broadcast these confessions were active participants in the process of making them, from using the police-provided script of questions, concealing the truth of the confession set-up, to producing a sophisticated news package with graphics, and

interviews with police and commentators to paint the suspect as guilty—despite them often not having been charged with a crime.

For anyone who doubts these confessions are manufactured propaganda they only need to read the testimony of renowned human rights lawyer Wang Yu, who provided her lengthy testimony for this report. Disappeared for 10 months on trumped up charges, and just a few weeks after undergoing surgery for breast cancer, Ms. Wang was coerced into recording a videoed confession to protect her teenaged son. Her harsh treatment in custody had affected her memory so much that she could not remember the words the police told her to say. After making hours and hours of retakes over several weeks, they resorted to printing her lines on a computer in large font, like a teleprompter. But it still wasn't good enough; that confession video never aired, and Ms. Wang stayed locked up until August.

The timing and content of the confessions indicates that they are often used for propaganda purposes—both for domestic *and* **overseas** consumption. Some of the confessions were timed to coincide with crackdowns, such as a new law in 2013 to stop “rumours” spreading online; a summer 2014 campaign against drug use, and the now notorious 709 Crackdown against human rights lawyers and activists that was launched in July 2015. Others are aired shortly after criticism, mostly from sources outside mainland China, concerning the victim's detention. These confessions are worded as direct rebuttals, such as the confessor denies being tortured or kidnapped by Chinese security. These types of confessions were most often made by **overseas nationals**. Other signs of propaganda include confessors who praise and defend the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), its agencies including the police, and its actions. Others denounce and criminalise colleagues and friends who have also been detained or recently sentenced. Many of the confessions are delivered by human rights defenders, independent journalists, and Uighurs, individuals that are typically seen as CCP critics or enemies.

China's televised confessions are reminiscent of violent and degrading episodes of political persecution from history. They have been compared to Stalin's show trials, the public struggle sessions of China's Cultural Revolution and the more recent shame parades when suspects are put on show to be humiliated in front of the public; a practice that China only outlawed a few years ago. Televised confessions represent such a transgression of rights that they are only practiced today by regimes such as North Korea and Iran. They deprive the suspect of due process; infringing on the right to a fair trial, the presumption of innocence, the right to remain silent, the right not to self-incriminate and the right to be protected against giving a forced confession and torture. These are fundamental human rights, largely part of customary international law, which are binding upon all states regardless of treaty ratification. China, itself, has ostensibly enshrined the right to a fair trial, the right not to self-incriminate, and incorporated protections against forced confessions and torture into its Criminal Procedure Law. All interviewees said they had no access to a lawyer to discuss their confessions; while 18 of the confessions analysed in this study were people held under the custodial system, **Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location (RSDL)**, a form of detention that in many cases effectively amounts to an enforced disappeared, where the suspect is kept in solitary confinement with no procedural safeguards, such as access to a lawyer or prosecutorial oversight.

China's use of forced televised confessions **warrants urgent global attention. The practice constitutes a human rights violation not confined to China's borders: foreign nationals count among the victims; privately-owned media from outside the mainland**

have been co-opted into filming and broadcasting them; while Beijing’s aggressive push to globalize its party/state media—including on social media channels banned at home—to “tell the China story” means these human rights violations end up on screens across the globe, dressed up as “news.” Media organizations that film, collaborate with police in the staged and scripted process, and broadcast these confessions, whether they be Chinese state media or private outfits, are as culpable as the Chinese state in committing this deceptive, illegal and human rights violating practice.

Recommendations

The continued use of forced televised confessions and their more frequent use to counter overseas criticism, such as with the recent February 2018 broadcast of Swedish citizen Gui Minhai’s *third* confession video by a number of additional media outlets, including Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post*, illustrate that the practice and propaganda reach of forced confessions are widening. In that latest video confession by Mr. Gui, following international condemnation after his abduction in the company of Swedish consular officials, he is made to accuse Sweden of using him like a “pawn.”

China’s televised confessions violate Chinese law and universally accepted human rights norms and are part of China’s carefully scripted propaganda efforts. Chinese state broadcaster, CCTV, as the main vehicle for the televised confessions, is directly culpable in this crime.

Safeguard Defenders recommendations:

- **The People’s Republic of China:** should immediately halt the use of televised confessions, provide all detainees with the legal protections already enshrined in domestic law and review the existing legal framework to prevent further violations.
- **Overseas governments:** should unequivocally stress to the People’s Republic of China:
 - the need for stronger protections in law and in enforcement for due process;
 - that it must immediately cease broadcasting televised confessions of detainees;
 - that there will be consequences for ongoing violations of fundamental rights and freedoms.
- **International media** has an obligation to ethically and responsibly report on China’s televised confessions, by exercising caution and adding crucial background that explains how the practice violates both Chinese law and international human rights protections; that threats and torture are routinely used as coercion; that they are often scripted and staged by the police; and that they are very likely a vehicle of Party propaganda.
- **Immediate action should be taken against Chinese media responsible for the broadcast of televised confessions.** This report identifies CCTV and its channels –

CCTV1, CCTV4, CGTN (formerly known as CCTV9) and CCTV13 as the main vehicles for China's televised confessions. Recommended actions are:

- Utilize the Foreign Agents Registration Act (in the U.S.) and equivalent in other countries, to force CCTV and responsible media to register as a foreign agent.
- Utilize existing tools to sanction (travel bans and asset freezes) on key CCTV executives. This would follow similar action taken on Iran's Press TV in 2013 by the EU after its broadcasts of forced televised confessions.
- Introduce Magnitsky-style legislation in jurisdictions without a Magnitsky Act and use that to pursue further action on all CCP-owned or controlled media, including CCTV.

Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|--|
| CCP | Chinese Communist Party |
| CCTV | China Central Television |
| CGTN | China Global Television Network |
| CDIC | Central Commission for Discipline Inspection |
| CPL | Criminal Procedure Law |
| FARA | Foreign Agents Registration Act |
| MSS | Ministry of State Security |
| PSB | Public Security Bureau (police) |
| RSDL | Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location |
| SAPPRFT | State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television |
| SCIO | State Council Information Office |
| SCMP | South China Morning Post |
| UNHRC | United Nations Human Rights Committee |

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INTRODUCTION

"[The police] threatened that if I did not cooperate with them, they would sentence me to jail time, I'd lose my job, my family would leave me, and I'd lose my reputation for the rest of my life. I was only 39 years old, my hair turned white with the enormous pressure and torture of it all."

Li, human rights defender

Background

On 9 February 2018, just a few weeks after being snatched by Chinese security off a train in front of Swedish consular officials, Swedish bookseller Gui Minhai (桂敏海) gave his third televised confession. It was hard to watch. Speaking at a detention centre, Mr. Gui looked high strung; at times he paused and repeated himself as if trying to remember lines; parts of his confession were reminiscent of pro-China propaganda, unmistakably similar to comments he—and other—detainees had made before on camera. Close-up shots revealed a new missing tooth. Most bizarrely, he accused Sweden of spoiling his happy life in China—a life that ever since he was kidnapped by Chinese agents in Thailand in October 2015, he has spent in secret detention or under heavy police surveillance.

Mr. Gui's televised confession emerged after an eight-month hiatus in the broadcast of high-profile suspects confessing on television. The first high-profile confession was aired in July 2013 when Liang Hong (梁鸿), a GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) senior executive in China, appeared on state-run CCTV admitting to bribery.¹ By the time Mr. Gui's confession was broadcast in February 2018, at least 45 separate high-profile confession broadcasts had been aired, mostly on Chinese state TV, a few on private but pro-China, Hong Kong-based media, with more than 75 different confessors. Over half of these high-profile detainees were involved in human rights or free speech related activities—lawyers, activists, journalists and bloggers.

Many confessors make their recording before even being formally arrested and all before trial.

Many confessors make their recording before even being formally arrested and all before trial. They have no access to a lawyer, prompting many to label them "trial by media."² Many are connected with politically-sensitive issues and include Chinese nationals, ethnic minorities, Hongkongers, and foreigners. The broadcasts have triggered widespread condemnation overseas and, to a lesser extent at home, from legal professionals for being unlawful, another tool of state repression and for resembling the injustices of Mao-era public struggle sessions. Several victims have publicly retracted their confessions, saying they were faked and forced.

These televised confessions are not only a human rights violation inside China, they impact the rest of the world. Several of the victims are foreigners, at least three were kidnapped by Chinese agents outside China's borders, and the broadcasts are reaching homes across the planet as China aggressively expands the reach of its state-run media. Forced confessions are also arguably one of the most pernicious examples of the weaponisation of state media by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). When Chinese media broadcast forced confessions they are functioning primarily as agents of the CCP.

SCRIPTED AND STAGED

The confessions in this study are just the tip of the iceberg. China routinely broadcasts the televised confessions of petty criminals, but this report has focused on the high-profile cases that, because they involve human rights defenders, foreigners, celebrities or headline-making stories, such as brutal murders or massive financial crime, have grabbed the attention of the English-language media.³ Irrespective of the case, whether the detainee is a human rights defender or a suspect in a financial crime, the broadcast of any confession on state or regional television should be regarded as a violation of human rights and the right to a fair trial and is equally condemned by Safeguard Defenders. From this context, the broadcast of Liang Hong's confession back in July 2013 can be seen as the CCP's appropriation and weaponisation of a routine style of "news reporting" by China's state media that has consistently violated Chinese law, international human rights protections, and journalistic ethics.

Research

Scripted and Staged collected and studied data on the confession broadcasts (including transcripts of the confessions) and case details for all high-profile televised confessions⁴ broadcast between July 2013 and February 2018. (Please see Appendix I for Methodology).

We conducted semi-structured interviews and solicited written testimony from **12** individuals who had appeared on television to give a "confession;" recorded a confession that was not broadcast; had been pressured to make a recorded confession but had resisted; and one relative of someone who had made three televised confessions. In addition to victims, we also interviewed Chinese legal scholars for their comments on the legal aspects, domestic and international, of televised confessions of detainees. We have concealed the identities, including the gender (all anonymous interviewees are written as male, although this is not necessarily the case) of several of those who talked with us and who still live in China because of a fear of reprisals from the Chinese authorities. Without their help and their courage in speaking out this report would not have been possible. Below is a list of names and pseudonyms of those whose written testimony or interview forms the backbone of *Scripted and Staged: Behind the scenes of China's forced TV confessions*.

Bao Longjun, legal activist and husband of lawyer Wang Yu, was detained in July 2015 as part of the 709 Crackdown⁵ and held for one year. He made one televised confession in October 2015 to condemn those who tried to smuggle his son out of the country. Mr. Bao's comments in this report were taken from a short testimony he wrote about his forced televised confession for Safeguard Defenders.

Chen Taihe, lawyer and scholar, now living in exile with his family in the US, was also detained in July 2015 as part of the 709 Crackdown and released in February 2016. He made a videoed confession but it was never been released. Mr. Chen's comments were taken from an interview he gave to one of the researchers for this report in 2017.

Peter Dahlin, a Swedish human rights worker, was detained in January 2016 for several weeks and then deported from China. His televised confession was aired that same month. Mr. Dahlin wrote his testimony and also gave an interview in 2018 for this report.

Angela Gui, is the daughter of Gui Minhai, the Swedish publisher who was kidnapped by Chinese security agents from his Thai home in October 2015. Mr. Gui was forced

to give three televised confessions, two in 2016 and one in 2018. Ms. Gui has openly campaigned for her father's release since he disappeared. Her comments in this report were taken from an interview she gave Safeguard Defenders in 2018.

Guo (pseudonym), a human rights defender, was initially detained and beaten before being released and then detained again and forced to record a confession on video, which has not been aired to date. Guo offered his written testimony anonymously for this report.

Peter Humphrey, a British citizen, was running a corporate investigations firm when he was detained with his wife in July 2013 in a case that is widely considered to be politically motivated. He gave two televised confessions, one shortly after his arrest in August 2013 and another before his trial in July 2014. Mr. Humphrey now lives in the UK with his wife, after being released from prison on medical grounds in June 2015. His testimony is drawn from a lengthy interview he gave for this report in January 2018.

Lam Wing-Kee, one of the Hong Kong booksellers and a Hong Kong citizen, was detained in October 2015 in Shenzhen. He fled bail in June 2016 and held an explosive press conference in Hong Kong to expose how he had been kidnapped by Chinese security agents and forced to confess on camera. Two of his recorded confessions were aired, one in February 2016 with three of the other Hong Kong booksellers, and another in July 2016 that was clearly an attempt to refute his revelations at that press conference. Mr. Lam's testimony in this report is an edited extract from his written statement to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, which he submitted in May 2017, with added material from an interview Mr. Lam gave to one of the researchers of this report.

Li (pseudonym), a human rights defender, was detained for a year during which time the police constantly pressured him to give a video confession. He refused. Li's testimony is drawn from an interview he gave one of the researchers of this report in 2017.

Ming (pseudonym), a human rights defender who was detained and forced to give a confession to camera. It was later aired on state television. Ming's comments were drawn from a short interview made for this report in late 2017.

Wang Yu, rights defence lawyer, and wife of Bao Longjun, was detained in July 2015 as part of the 709 Crackdown. She made two televised confessions, one in October 2015 to condemn those who tried to smuggle her son out of the country and another in August 2016 as she was released on bail. Ms. Wang wrote her extensive testimony for this report in 2017 and 2018.

Wen (pseudonym), a human rights defender, was detained and tortured before giving his televised confession that was aired shortly afterwards. Wen offered his written testimony anonymously for this report.

Zhao (pseudonym), a human rights defender, was detained and appeared as a supporting confessor in one broadcast televised confession. He offered his written testimony anonymously for this report.

Several other victims of forced televised confessions have been consulted for this publication. For more detail, see Appendix I: Methodology.

Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location, or RSDL, is a custodial system, legalized in 2013, where victims are held in solitary confinement, often in custom-built prisons, outside of the judicial system, for up to six months. While in RSDL, victims are not allowed visits from family member nor lawyers, and even the state prosecutor is often barred from providing oversight. The whereabouts of the victim is most often kept secret, under claims of a threat to national security. Because of this, use of RSDL often amounts to *enforced disappearances*. The victims of China's 709 crackdown and other human rights defenders who have been forced to make televised confessions were often held in RSDL while they were forced to make such recordings.

THE CONFESSIONS

SOURCE: SCREENSHOTS TAKEN FROM NEWS MEDIA WEBSITES (SEE APPENDIX IV FOR LINKS).



THE 'CONFESSORS'

"CCTV's broadcasts are tantamount to trial by media and they convict people without the court. They never air people's denial of their alleged crimes, or quote us lawyers."

Mo Shaoping, lawyer⁶

Resembling to the lead and supporting actors in a play, China's televised confessions feature two types of confessors—called main confessors and supporting confessors in this report. The main confessors are the focus of the news report—the news is about their “confession”—whereas supporting confessors, often suspects in the same case, are used to accuse the main confessor or an off-screen target. Often, but not always, their identity is obscured by pixellating their face and only giving their family name. The main confessors are the focus of this report.

The confessions in numbers

Altogether, **45** televised confessions were found between **July 2013** (when the first high-profile televised confession was reported in western media) and **February 2018**. The most common format was a **single** main confessor, but **three** had two main confessors and **four** had no main confessors (one or more supporting confessors attacked off-screen targets).⁷

There were a total of **37** main confessors, **five** of whom appeared in multiple confession broadcasts.⁸ Detainees who appeared in multiple confessions sometimes confessed to very different crimes from one confession to another.⁹ There were almost **50** supporting confessors,¹⁰ **four** of whom were also main confessors on separate broadcasts.¹¹ The number of confessions in this study per year varied between **9** and **14** from 2013 to 2016, dropping off sharply in 2017 with just **two** confessions, and **one** so far in 2018.

Between 2013 and 2016 there was a steady number (averaging one a month) of high-profile televised confessions, indicating that they were seen as useful—possibly serving multiple purposes—despite the negative coverage they garnered in the western press. The sharp decline in 2017 also coincides with an apparent increase in use of in-trial courtroom videoed confessions (sometimes first released on the court's Weibo account and then rebroadcast on state television).¹²

Who confesses?

More than half of the confessions—**60%**—are detainees who either worked in media (journalists, bloggers and publishers) or were human rights defenders (lawyers, NGO workers and activists). This report classifies these as “**rights**” cases; they are people whom the CCP typically perceives as its enemies or critics and are usually charged with national security crimes (such as the stealing of state secrets, state subversion, inciting state subversion, or separatism) or social order violations (for example, creating a disturbance, defamation, obscenity, picking quarrels and provoking troubles, and spreading rumours).

The remaining 40% are classified as “other”. They range from terrorism (all Uighur detainees, 4), financial crimes such as telecom fraud (2) and operating an illegal Ponzi scheme (2), to drug use (marijuana and crystal meth, 3 cases) to murder (1). Detainees whose cases are coded as “other” range from minor celebrities such as Taiwanese pop star Ko Chen-tung (柯震東), businessmen such as Ezubao founder, Ding Ning (丁宁) and unemployed salesman Zhang Lidong (张立冬) who beat a woman to death in a McDonald’s outlet. Irrespective of the “case”, televised confessions violate the right to a fair trial and the presumption of innocence; both are equally condemned in this report.

China’s televised confessions are used for a broad spectrum of suspected crimes, but the sizeable number of rights cases is a clear indication that they are used as a tool to discredit and suppress lawyers, activists and independent journalists.

Only **four** confessions out of 45 featured female main confessors.¹³

While the majority—68%¹⁴—were Han Chinese from the mainland, a significantly high number, five, were Uighur (12%) from the mainland—yet they make up less than 1% of the population. Eight (20%) were not from mainland China at all—three from Taiwan, two from Sweden, and one each from the UK, Hong Kong and the US.

Where do confessions happen?

Just under half of the confessions were filmed when the detainees were held by a Beijing branch of security (19 out of 45); with sizeable numbers in Xinjiang (5), Shanghai (4), Hunan (4), and Zhejiang (4).

Since the televised confession cannot be done without the cooperation of the branch of security in charge of the detainee, Beijing has clearly been the most active in organizing and leading the way in the use of forced televised confessions of high-profile cases.



THE SCENE

“Televised confessions are unacceptable, they are even more despicable than the shame parade that was once common in China. They not only trample on human dignity, but also violate the fundamental principles of criminal procedure.”

Li Fangping, lawyer

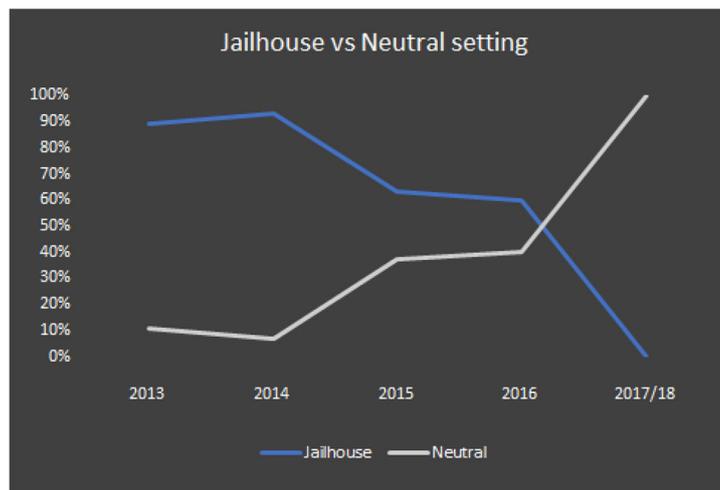
China’s televised confessions can be divided into two “types” according to how they are filmed. **Jailhouse** confessions show the detainee in a prison/detention centre setting and clearly dressed in prison clothes (usually a prison vest, sometimes prison overalls). Often, they are handcuffed, locked into an interrogation chair, and behind bars. Many, and all but one of the Uighur detainees, had their head shaved.¹⁵ Sometimes they are also shown walking past rows of cells, flanked by police officers, being interrogated, and occasionally signing a “confession”.

By 2015, **neutral** confessions had become more popular, especially for “rights” cases. Here the detainee is typically shown in a non-custodial setting—it could be a hotel room or an office. In Wang Yu’s (王宇) second confession in August 2016, it was a garden. They wear civilian clothing, they are not shown handcuffed or with their head shaved; and are usually—but not always—filmed alone with no obvious police presence.¹⁶

The year 2015 marked an obvious jump in the use of neutral settings for confessions when almost half of all televised confessions were neutral. No “rights” cases were neutral before 2015, after which there was a clear preference for showing them as neutral. 2015 was also the year when China launched its 709 Crackdown.

By contrast, “other” cases were almost always jailhouse—only two out of the 18 “other” cases were neutral. The reason for this is unclear, but it may have something to do with an effort to “soften” or disguise the coercive environment for a more critical overseas audience where “rights” cases typically receive greater media scrutiny.

It is important to note that the setting of the televised confession bears no relation to the condition of the victim’s detention. Many of the detainees who were filmed in a neutral setting were detained under the custodial RSDL system and, for some, in conditions amounting to torture with both physical beatings and forced medication.



the neutral setting

Civilian clothes and anonymous non-custodial type locations are typical of neutral confessions



SCREENSHOTS TAKEN FROM NEWS MEDIA WEBSITES (SEE APPENDIX IV FOR LINKS).

Clockwise from top left: Lawyer Zhai Yanmin wears a black t-shirt similar to other lawyer confessors in this July 2015 broadcast; fellow lawyer Wang Yu gives her confession in a Tianjin garden in her August 2016 televised confession; another lawyer, Xie Yang, wears a polo shirt and appears to be an office with several pot plants broadcast in May 2017; while Swedish bookseller Gui Minhai gives his February 2018 staged press conference in jeans and jacket. The venue is a detention centre in Ningbo, but the recording appears to be in some kind of reception room.

the jailhouse setting

Strong visual signs of detention and guilt such as bars, handcuffs, prison clothing and shaved heads are the norm in jailhouse confessions



SCREENSHOTS TAKEN FROM NEWS MEDIA WEBSITES (SEE APPENDIX IV FOR LINKS).

Clockwise from top left: Journalist Chen Yongzhou's October 2013 confession has him in a green prison shirt and a shaved head. Fellow journalist Gao Yu's face is pixelated although she is identified by name in the broadcast dated 8 May 2014. The striped wallpaper is seen in many of the early jailhouse confessions. Online celebrity Guo Meimei's jailhouse confession in August 2014 is in sharp contrast to her online glamorous posts prior to her arrest. In the same month, Nurmemet Abidilimit, a Uighur accused of killing an imam, has one of the strongest jailhouse confessions in this study. He is locked into an interrogation chair, behind bars, with a shaved head and prison vest.



wang yu (part 1)

Wang Yu is one of China's most respected human rights lawyers. Originally a commercial lawyer, she dedicated herself to rights defence work in 2011 after her own experiences with police abuse and wrongful imprisonment. She and her husband, Bao Longjun, were caught up in the 709 Crackdown and kept in RSDL and detention for more than a year. She was awarded the American Bar Association International Human Rights Award while she was in state custody.

This is the first part of Ms. Wang's written testimony.

CREDIT: MELTAN- ARTIST IMPRESSION OF POLICE MAKING A FORCED VIDEO CONFESSION IN A CELL.

It was the end of July 2015. I had been taken less than a month earlier, and my interrogator—he said his name was “Chief Wang”—started trying to convince me to go on television. I refused without a second’s thought. I would not write anything and would never go on their television to confess.

On 1 August 2015, after dinner, a girl came in and told me to change my clothes. She said we had to go out for something. I asked: “Where? And for what?” She didn’t know. She was just a messenger.

Chief Wang came into my cell after I had changed. He said he was taking me for my television confession. I was very angry. “I told you I would not record anything or go on television!” I said.

He didn’t care. He just put a black hood over my head and, at least this time, he took me without putting me in handcuffs. In the car, I demanded again and again to be taken back. I told them I definitely wouldn’t go on television. If they wanted to force me, I threatened to jump out of the car. Chief Wang maliciously told me to go ahead.

Of course, I just wanted to show my determination. I didn’t want to die. I wanted to live for many more years.

We were in the car for more than an hour before reaching the CCTV building. They took me into the elevator. I kept repeating: “I won’t record anything!”

Once we got inside I was afraid that they would take me directly into the studio, and that they would be filming as soon as they took off my black hood. So, I put my head down and used my hair to cover my face once they removed the black hood.

I kept repeating: “I won’t record anything!”

A person by the door said: “I heard your accent. Lawyer Wang is from Dongbei [northeast China]. I’m also from Dongbei; let’s talk.” I said I didn’t know him and had nothing to talk to him about. Another person brought a bottle of water for me, asked me if I was thirsty and that we could talk after having some water. I was really quite thirsty, but I told him to stay away from me.

“I don’t want to say anything! If you continue forcing me, I will kill myself right here.”

In the end, a female host said: “If she really doesn’t want to speak, let it go. Just let her leave.”

Then she addressed me: “Lawyer Wang, I respect your determination. If you don’t want to speak today, it is okay. We will wait until you want to speak.”

“You have kidnapped me and are forcing me and violating my right to privacy. You don’t need to wait. If you do, you will be disappointed. I will never come back here.”

On our way out, no one spoke, but because I hadn’t made a televised recording, I was so happy inside.

After a few days, maybe on 4 or 5 August, Chief Wang came back. He took me into a room like a hotel, but obviously we hadn’t left the yard. The room was decorated like a standard hotel room. There was a bathroom with a normal door. Towards the back was a table, in front of which was a blue armchair. There was a single bed. The room was not big, about 10m².

Chief Wang brought a camera with him this time. He still wanted me to reflect on my situation. I glared at him, saying nothing. I sat there the whole morning.

At around noon, Chief Wang disappointedly sent me back to the detention area.

On the morning of 7 August, the team leader took me to the so-called Beijing Tongda Guesthouse. We could hear the sound of airplanes in the sky every day. In the beginning, I thought we were near one of the airports, but afterwards I learned from a base manager that it was the same location as my previous detention facility, on the edge of Beijing, inside a military base, in a small town in Hebei Province.

That day, Chief Wang came to tell me that the crime I was officially now suspected of was “inciting subversion of state power” and so they had changed my coercive measure to Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location (RSDL).

I was speechless.

After I was transferred to Tianjin RSDL on 8 September 2015, my interrogators in Tianjin also tried to persuade me many times to go on television. I also refused.

It was midnight, 10 October 2015. I had just fallen asleep when one of my guards woke me up and said the interrogators were coming soon. Two interrogators came in just after I had put on my clothes. They looked very serious. We all sat down and then they handed me two pieces of paper. I saw that the first piece was a telegram from Yunnan police department to the Inner Mongolia police department. It said that they had caught several people trying to smuggle across the border in Yunnan. One was Bao Zhuoxuan, aged 16, from Inner Mongolia and a student in Ulanhot [her son]. On the second page, suddenly, I saw a large photo of my son. It was the same kind of photo that gets taken when you first enter a detention centre. He was stood against the wall with a height rule. The text under the photo said: Suspect Bao Zhuoxuan. I fainted immediately. I don't know how long I was unconscious, but when I woke up I was in bed and surrounded by several medical personnel. I still felt dizzy and was finding it hard to breathe. They told me my blood pressure was too high, gave me some medicine and then left.

“He said my attitude would decide whether my son would be saved. I didn't know what to feel. I asked: how could I save him? He said that I should record a video for the PSB boss to demonstrate my [good] attitude.”

My interrogator arrived. He told me that my son had been taken by anti-China forces but that luckily the police had found him and he was currently in Yunnan. He said my attitude would decide whether my son would be saved. I didn't know what to feel. I asked: how could I save him?

He said that I should record a video for the PSB boss to demonstrate my [good] attitude. I asked: What kind of video? What kind of attitude? They wrote down everything that I had to say on a piece of paper asked me to memorise it. I don't remember clearly what it said just that it was about denouncing certain anti-China forces.

Then they turned on the computer camera which was used during interrogations. They said: “Look you can see that we're not putting you on television, if we were, we would be using a professional camera”. Two days later they told me the boss was happy with the recording and that my son was already in Ulanhot. This was how my first televised interview happened. I did not know at the time that it would be put on television, it wasn't until I was released and allowed to go back to Ulanhot, that my parents and my friends told me about it. [The police] broke their promise about not putting it on television.

THE PURPOSE

"I stumble four times on the only line I really want to say: 'I have hurt the feelings of the Chinese people.' After the fourth take the 'journalist' leans in and says: 'You really don't want to say this line do you?' She couldn't be more wrong. I nail it on the fifth."

Peter Dahlin, NGO worker

China's televised confessions are much more than simple admissions of guilt. They often include statements of self-criticism, regret, and accusations against others. Suspects apologize to their families, their fans, and the Chinese government; they warn others not to repeat their mistakes; they plead for mercy; and promise not to commit crimes again.

Detainees in "rights" cases typically confess or accuse others of committing "anti-China" crimes, such as plotting to overthrow the CCP.

Evidence for the political motivations behind China's televised confessions can be seen in the significant number of suspects who make statements that this study classifies as **Deny, Denounce** or **Defend (the 3 D's)**; statements that would not typically be associated with the confession of a crime. Their frequent occurrence is a strong indication that televised confessions are a CCP propaganda tool; the 3D's are far more common in "rights" cases.

- **Self-criticism**

"I am the worst role model. I was the worst influence. I made a huge mistake."

Taiwanese actor Ko Chen-teng (19 August 2014)

- **Warning**

"I'm also warning those so-called rights defence lawyers, don't get involved with overseas [groups], don't take their money."

Lawyer Zhang Kai (25 February 2016)

- **Anti-China**

"I admit that I blackened the name of the Party and the government. My behaviour is criminal. What I did, is to let down the Party and the government, even my family."

Journalist Xiang Nanfu (13 May 2014)

DENY

Deny statements rebut criticism of the Chinese state about the detention or treatment of the detainee. The key identifier for Deny confessions is that there is some kind of *protest* before the confession is broadcast, that is related to the detention and/or treatment of the detainee or, less commonly, the trial and sentencing of an off-screen target. These range from newspaper front-page appeals to free the individual inside China—Chen Yongzhou (陈永洲), critical international media coverage—Peter Dahlin, the Hong Kong booksellers,¹⁷ Wang Yu, Ilham Tohti, protest inside China—Lin Zuluán (林祖銓), to diplomatic pressure—Mr. Dahlin, Gui Minhai, and Xie Yang (谢阳). The confession itself usually, but not always, includes direct references to the criticism—for example, Mr. Gui said he didn't want Sweden to interfere in his case; Mr. Xie said he wasn't tortured; and Ms. Wang said her case had been handled properly by the Chinese authorities.

Deny statements in confessions are more common in “rights” cases—maybe because these are more likely to receive international media and diplomatic attention.

- “It was my own choice to come back and surrender. It has nothing to do with anyone else. I also don't want any individual or organization and that includes any in Sweden to intervene or interfere in the issue of my return to China. Even though I have Swedish Nationality, I sincerely feel that I am Chinese; my roots are still in China.”

Gui Minhai, 17 January 2016

- “I must say very earnestly that I made it all up. I am the one who did it. I made up the account of Xie Yang being tortured, that the police did something to his leg and how his leg swelled up and so on. With such detail people will believe it, because it's not just a big story it has detail.”

Jiang Tianyong, 4 March 2017

- “In these two periods [of my detention] the authorities protected my legitimate rights and interests and guaranteed our right to meet with our lawyers. Investigators did not use torture on me to elicit a confession and furthermore there was no ‘cruel torture’. As for the claims of ‘cruel torture’ circulating online I now very much regret these acts of wanton sensationalisation.”

Xie Yang, 9 May 2017

Deny confessions as a tool of foreign policy

This pattern of using manipulative video, where the main actor is a prisoner of the state, has become commonplace in China in recent years and is not just restricted to pre-trial televised confessions. On 29 February 2016, Hong Kong bookseller Lee Bo (李波) appeared on Phoenix TV to say that he had gone to the mainland of his own accord, he was not kidnapped as the press had been speculating and that he was giving up his British citizenship.^{18,19} In summer 2017, as jailed Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo (刘晓波) was dying from late-stage liver cancer in a military hospital, following a global outcry at his treatment, videos that could only have been made by the Chinese authorities were anonymously “leaked” onto the Internet. The videos showed him engaged in outdoor activities in jail and then being treated in hospital.²⁰

These kinds of videos, aired so soon after criticism, and engineered to be a rebuttal of that criticism, can only be seen as a propaganda tool, where the human rights of the manipulated individual are grossly violated—whether that is a dying prisoner’s right to privacy or a detainee’s right to a fair trial. When the criticism is from overseas governments or organizations, the televised confession becomes a foreign policy tool, that can either be viewed as a disingenuous effort on behalf of the Chinese state to refute the criticism or simply as a show of power.

The deny confessions

This report has identified 14 deny confessions.

(1) Chen Yongzhou (main confessor)

Date: 26 October 2013

Protest: After Chen Yongzhou, a journalist with the *New Express* was detained, his newspaper published two front page ads reading “请放人” (Please release him) in giant characters,²¹ in a rare example of a domestic protest.

(2) Ilham Tohti’s students (Ilham Tohti off-screen target)

Date: 26 September 2014

Protest: Supporters of Ilham Tohti, a well-known and respected Uighur scholar, inside and outside China criticized the decision to sentence him to life imprisonment for separatism, which was handed down several days before this broadcast.²²

(3) Wang Yu (main confessor), Bao Longjun (supporting confessor)

Date: 17 October 2014

Protest: Critical western media coverage of how Chinese police captured Ms. Wang’s and Mr. Bao’s son as he tried to escape China with two rights activists on 9 October 2015.²³ The confession was aired a week later. Ms. Wang said: “I don’t want this to happen again... as his parent, I hope the police can protect him.”

(4) Gui Minhai (main confessor)

Date: 17 January 2016

Protest: Protests in Hong Kong and critical coverage in international media over the apparent kidnapping of Gui Minhai from his Thailand home by Chinese security agents in November 2015. Mr. Gui said: “It was my own choice to come back and surrender. It has nothing to do

with anyone else. I also don't want any individual or organization and that includes Sweden to intervene or interfere in my case."

(5) Peter Dahlin (main confessor)

Date: 19 January 2016

Protest: Protests from international media and inquiries from Sweden on the detention of Peter Dahlin, in particular concerning his treatment (he suffers from a possibly fatal medical condition). A week after news broke of his detention, the confession was aired. Mr. Dahlin said: "I have no complaints to make. I think my treatment has been fair... I have been given good food. Plenty of sleep... And I have also been given the opportunity to meet with representatives from my embassy."

(6) Gui Minhai (main confessor) and three Hong Kong booksellers (supporting confessors)

Date: 28 February 2016

Protest: Continued criticism from Hong Kong and internationally of China over the kidnapping and detention of the Hong Kong booksellers and Mr. Gui.

(7) and (8) Taiwan telecom fraud suspects (supporting confessors with identities obscured)

Dates: 15 April 2016 and 2 May 2016

Protest: Outcry from Taiwan after 32 of their citizens were deported from Kenya to face trial in China for telecom fraud. In the first broadcast, one of the detainees apologized to the "people of the mainland," while in the second broadcast, one of the detainees said: "If I had known earlier that I would be tried in the mainland I wouldn't have done it. In the mainland I could get a life sentence."

(9) Lin Zuluang (main confessor)

Date: 21 June 2016

Protest: Several thousand Wukan villagers marched in the streets to protest the arrest of their village chief Lin Zuluang on corruption charges. Mr. Lin's confession was aired at a press conference, where he admitted to taking bribes. As well as the confession being aired on state TV, it was sent to the social media accounts of the villagers.²⁴

(10) Lam Wing-kee (main confessor)

Date: 6 July 2016

Protest: Global media frenzy after Mr. Lam held a press conference in Hong Kong, where he described how he had been abducted by Chinese security and forced to make a confession.²⁵ Three weeks after, CCTV aired old footage of Mr. Lam. In this "confession" Mr. Lam said he had broken the law by bringing illegal books into China; it also showed him listening to a policeman read out his bail conditions and reading and eating in detention.

(11) Wang Yu (main confessor)

Date: 1 August 2016

Protest: International media attention on the trial of Zhou Shifeng (周世锋), the key target of the 709 Crackdown, scheduled for 4 August; also media attention on Ms. Wang's case. In this confession, Ms. Wang praised China's judiciary, disparaged Mr. Zhou as a lawyer and his company, Fengrui Law Firm, again condemned those who plotted to smuggle her son out of the country, and rejected a human rights award from overseas.

(12) Jiang Tianyong (main confessor), Xie Yang (supporting confessor)

Date: 2 March 2017

Protest: International media outcry and government criticism over allegations of torture of Mr. Xie²⁶ in custody. In this confession video, Jiang Tianyong (江天勇) said he fabricated the torture allegations and Mr. Xie as a supporting confessor tells journalists that he is in good health, getting plenty of sleep and exercise and that the detention centre is looking after him well.

(13) Xie Yang (main confessor)

Date: 9 May 2017

Protest: International media outcry and government criticism over allegations of torture of Mr. Xie in custody. Aired around the same time as his trial, this confession broadcast shows Mr. Xie again denying he was tortured.

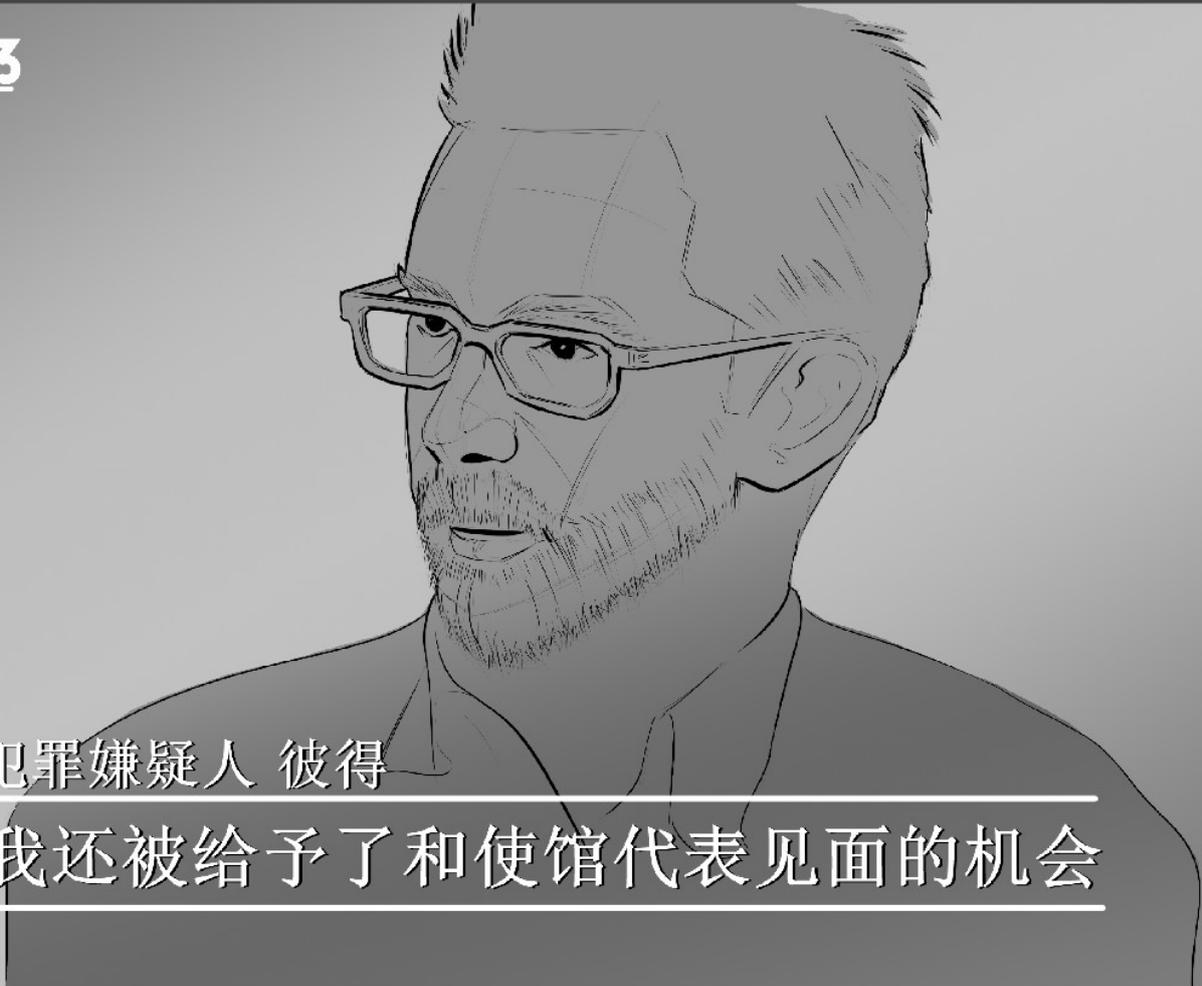
(14) Gui Minhai (main confessor)

Date: 9 February 2018

Protest: International media outcry over Mr. Gui's detention in front of two Swedish consular staff off a train a few weeks earlier. Mr. Gui appears before selected pro-Beijing media to accuse Sweden of playing him like a "pawn" and to deny that he has been positively diagnosed with the debilitating condition, ALS.

peter dahlin

CCTV13
新闻



北京 犯罪嫌疑人 彼得
新闻直播间 我还被给予了和使馆代表见面的机会

CREDIT: ALEXEY GARMASH. ARTIST RENDERING OF CCTV13 SCREENSHOT OF PETER DAHLIN'S TELEVISED CONFESSION.

Peter Dahlin, from Sweden, is a long-time human rights activist and co-founder of the NGO, China Action, which worked to support the rule of law, strengthen the capacity of lawyers and rights defenders, and undertook public interest litigation in China. Chinese State Security agents detained Mr. Dahlin and his girlfriend on the evening of 3 January 2016 and held them for around three weeks in RSDL. Following intense international media scrutiny and diplomatic pressure related to his detention and fears for his health (he has a serious medical condition), he was pressured into making a televised confession. Shortly afterwards, he was released and deported back to Sweden.

State Security Agent Zhang, who had taken to playing the “good cop” role while his colleague handled the “bad cop” act, arrived sometime after dinner time. “Have you had dinner yet?” he asked after entering my cell. He pulled up a chair next to my tiny bed; the two guards who would otherwise sit staring at me 24 hours a day left. These cozy “fireside chats”—I called them this because they reminded me of [former US president] Franklin Roosevelt’s World War II broadcasts, would happen every once in a while, and were a welcome break from the extreme boredom of solitary confinement, or the daily (or rather, nightly) intense five- to six-hour interrogations.

At this point, I’d spent some two or three weeks in a secret prison south of Beijing and had been accused of using foreign funding to subvert state power. The case was being handled by the Ministry of State Security. My girlfriend had been taken in the same raid, despite having no connection to my work, and was languishing while they decided on my case. A long list of colleagues or partners were taken either in the same operation or had been taken one by one over the preceding six months. Almost everyone was disappeared—not arrested—and placed into solitary confinement under what they call Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location, a new favourite new tool of suppression.

“My medical condition – Addison’s disease, which could be fatal – offered them a way out”

“I’ve just spent the whole day at court,” Agent Zhang told me. “You know I have pushed very hard for them to find a diplomatic solution... I have pushed for this hard, as I think it’s the best way to resolve the situation.” He told me he was going back again tomorrow to see the panel of “judges” who were deliberating my case and were deciding whether to prosecute me or not. There was a chance they could arrange a diplomatic solution on medical grounds. I knew full well that this is not how the legal procedure is supposed to work in China, but then again laws are rarely worth the paper they are written on there, and I had no reason to doubt him.

The initial accusations against me had all been dispelled. They wanted to end this. My medical condition—Addison’s disease which could be fatal—offered them a way out. They wouldn’t want a dead foreigner on their hands.

Every once in a while, Agent Zhang would visit me in my cell for these informal “fireside chats” instead of questioning me in the interrogation room. Often, a Nescafé would be offered, and he would bring a pack of cigarettes and I could smoke as much as I wanted. The heavy curtains would be opened for a bit of sunset light, or if it was night-time, the windows were opened for some fresh air. These were our “bonding” moments. Or rather, it was their way to create a sense of dependency in me for the “good cop” so that they could more easily persuade me to cooperate.

The previous night, I’d been woken at around 3 in the morning, hurried into the interrogation room opposite my cell, where for hours they had conducted a formal deposition. Agent Zhang was now saying he needed something more to convince the judges not to prosecute. My written self-criticisms had not been enough. “I want to record a video of you accepting responsibility and showing that you know what you did was wrong,” he said. The judges might be convinced by a video.

Up until this point they had spent a lot of time getting me to write self-criticisms. These were not about admitting any particular crime, and I never did commit a crime, but to admit to general wrongdoing. I was to put in writing, I now realized, that I had been wrong,

that I had hurt China. Like Winston Smith, the protagonist in George Orwell's novel, *1984*, I was supposed to realize my wrongdoing, accept being reformed by the "helpful" State Security who had shown me the error of my ways, and to demonstrate that I actually believed it all. It wasn't an easy task.

I assumed, although I was far from certain, that I would not be prosecuted, and that they were looking to find a way out. The media storm about my case had broken just a few days earlier—that much was made clear when they angrily asked about my relationship to the Reuters reporter Megha Rajagopalan who first broke my story, and who happened to be a friend of mine. Their anger about Michael Caster, my co-worker, who was handling advocacy and press on my behalf, was also clear. "He is spreading lies," they would yell. "What he is doing is hurting you." My casual remark that a phone call could fix all that did not go down well.

At that point, Agent Zhang stood up and said he had to arrange some things and would be back shortly. He told me he would inform the guards that I could have a shower. He also left me the pack of cigarettes and said he would instruct the guards to give me more Nescafé if I wanted. He told me to put on my own clothes after my shower, instead of what I wore everyday—grey sweatpants and sweater, with a fire-orange vest on top, all to make sure I felt like a criminal.

Not long after, maybe an hour or so later, he came back. He had brought his translator with him, which was rather comical because her English was no match for Agent Zhang's fluent grasp of the language.

Agent Zhang handed me a piece of paper with handwriting on both sides. He told me it was a "summary" of what had been said before during my endless interrogations and last night's deposition, but actually it was a list of questions and answers, and I was to be one of two "actors" playing out a scene. I quickly scanned the page and the true nature of this recording became clear. I had to say: "I have hurt the feelings of the Chinese people." I became suspicious of the purpose of the recording, and that it might be for public use became clear—although no one admitted it—when later I was taken to the larger "meeting room" next to the interrogation room, and saw the CCTV "journalist" and cameraman.

But I still went along with it. I knew for sure that including that incredibly crass line also meant that the media frenzy would go into overdrive. Everything else they wanted me to say would be negated by that one line. I might as well say: "I'm being forced to do this against my will, and no one has any reason to believe any of this is true."

Arguments followed. As always, they tried to subtly change my meaning or wording. During interrogations, we had had several shouting matches when both of us found our patience had run thin. The key issue was they insisted on calling lawyer Wang Quanzhang (王全璋) and other former partners "criminals," even though none of them had been convicted of any crime. I refused point blank. "There is simply no way I will call them criminals," I told them, even semantically it didn't make sense. How can you be a criminal without a criminal conviction? They relented.

Agent Zhang then left again, saying that he'd be back soon. "Please study the answers and memorise them," he told me. He returned with two guards in tow. They led me out of the cell across the narrow hallway to the "meeting room" where the recording was to be made. The room was packed. Agents Zhang and Liu (the "bad cop"), their supervisor,

"Opposite, but outside of view from the camera, sat the female "journalist", holding a piece of paper with the questions State Security had instructed her to read."

several young translators, the “journalist,” the cameraman, the officer who always handled taking notes, as well as several guards were all there. A small chair was reserved for me along the wall. Opposite, but outside of view from the camera, sat the female “journalist,” holding a piece of paper with the questions State Security had instructed her to read. She knew as well as me she was to be an actor, reading the lines as instructed by “director” Agent Zhang.

The “journalist” introduced herself. Confident. Fashionably dressed. Pretty. In her late 30s or early 40s. I was offered another cup of bland Nescafé. Behind us, one of the agents was holding a handheld camera. They discussed amongst themselves for a while, maybe even 30 minutes, taking the paper from me and making small changes.

“Ok, let’s go,” the “bad cop” finally said.

We ran through the seven or eight questions. A few retakes. Sit straighter they say. Speak slower here. Change this here. Guidance. In between takes, the main “director” and “screenwriter” Agent Zhang discussed changes with the “bad cop” and their superior, a sleek woman, maybe in her early 50s. Additional changes and re-takes followed. Once in a while, after scribbling changes, they handed me the paper so I could learn my new “lines.” Once, I placed it down on the floor beside me before shooting resumed, but Agent Zhang spotted what I was trying to do and nabbed it, making sure it wouldn’t be in shot.

“A few retakes. Sit straighter they say. Speak slower here. Change this here. Guidance.”

Most questions went well. I stumbled four times on the only line I really wanted to say: “I have hurt the feelings of the Chinese people.” After the fourth take the “journalist” leant in and said: “You really don’t want to say this line do you?” She couldn’t be more wrong. I nailed it on the fifth.

I was led out, back to my cell, but told to keep my own clothes on. They came back and fetched me two more times to record some minor additions here and there. I was given updated versions of the paper to show me what I needed to say. It was all done by 11. Agent Zhang seemed pleased. I was too.

Was it embarrassing? Were you hurt? Do you regret it? These are common questions from friends and journalists. Or, why did you do it? It’s hard to answer these questions because when you do it makes it sound like you’re trying to rationalise why you did it. For me, however, it was never really an issue. I had selfish reasons, such as I wanted to speed up my release, and the media frenzy I knew would come after being forced to say, “I have hurt the feelings of the Chinese people” would help with that. Every day I was being held mattered in terms of my medical condition. Other motives were nobler. I was repeatedly told that my girlfriend would only be released once my case had been dealt with, either by some form of release or being moved into pre-trial detention. They kept reminding me of this. Once, they showed me a photocopy of a drawing she had been allowed to make. It was devastating. That and when they told me later she was being freed, were the only two times I almost cracked, but in the end, I managed to keep my tears in.

Because I didn’t have to call Wang Quanzhang and some other colleagues criminals meant I didn’t really say anything of substance in that confession, and because I didn’t have to denounce others means the only thing that’s left is the embarrassment of it all, a small price to pay for my girlfriend’s and my own freedom. I also wanted badly to continue my rights work, and that was more important than being some kind of martyr. Unfortunately, what I didn’t know at the time, was that the attack on my organisation had been so wide-ranging that the NGO that I had run for so many years had to be dismantled.

Unlike many other victims of forced televised confessions, I've always operated behind the scenes. Few people, even my close friends, were aware of what I did, so I had no public reputation that could be destroyed. Still, it's embarrassing to be paraded on national television in front of hundreds of millions of viewers, and to this day, more or less every week, my name pops up in the news, and it's usually connected to that forced televised confession.

DENOUNCE

Denounce statements are expressions of self-criticism or criticism of a named individual, organization or even a country.²⁷ Typical accusations range from severe (associating with anti-China overseas forces) to the personal (unprofessional or immoral behaviour, such as sexual promiscuity).²⁸ Such statements are typical in the confessions of “rights” cases, and appear to be a deliberate attempt to discredit individuals or groups, such as human rights lawyers, activists, and bloggers.

- [Ilham Tohti said] “if you make me angry I’ll drag you to the desert and bury you. No one will find you. Then I thought this this person, he’s not like a teacher, he’s like a gangster.”
Luo Yuwei (Ilham Tohti’s former student), 26 September 2014
- “Certain organizations look like they are advocating religious freedom in China on the surface, but in fact they are politicising China’s religious issues, and they use these to strike at and criticise the Chinese government, and China’s human rights situation. They use us to hype up these church cases and to mobilise churchgoers against the government, and to change China’s political system.”
Zhang Kai, 25 February 2016
- “Looking back, I might have become Sweden’s chess piece. I broke the law again under their instigation. My wonderful life has been ruined and I would never trust the Swedish ever again.”
Gui Minhai, 9 February 2018

DEFEND

Defend statements are those that express support for the CCP or any of its agencies or actions. These include praise or support for the Party, the government, the police force, the judiciary and approval for any actions such as crackdowns.²⁹ Defend statements may be aimed at reinforcing CCP legitimacy, a display of state power, or simply attempts to humiliate the detainee; they also appear to be part of a propaganda drive when they coincide with a crackdown.

- “In the real world, there are rules. There need to be rules online.”
Charles Xue, 29 September 2013
- “In fact during these two months, with the help and instruction from the police, I have gained a better understanding of the seriousness and harmfulness of my crimes.”
Shen Hao, 21 November 2014
- “All my rights have been protected very well while I was detained. The judiciary in China has shown civility and humanity,”
Wang Yu, 1 August 2016

Guo is a human rights defender who still lives in China. He was first detained, beaten and then released before being picked up again a week or so later and forced to record a confession on camera. It was never aired. His identity has been concealed for his protection.

I was called on the phone by an unknown number one day while I was at work. The person on the phone told me they were the police. This was just a little over a week after I had been taken in a raid on my home and kept over a long weekend. Now they wanted to “see me” again. I was scared right away. The man on the phone told me meeting them, “would be good for me.” They told me to meet them at a hotel near my office later that afternoon. They ended the conversation by saying: “For your own sake you better keep quiet about this meeting. Don't talk to anyone.”

I went. I had no choice. Earlier, I had been severely beaten in detention when I didn't answer the way they wanted.

Once I arrived at the hotel room, I saw three people. There were two men, dressed in black and in plainclothes; the taller one in his 40s, and a younger guy maybe in his 30s. Both were heavysset, but not muscular. There was a woman too; she was maybe in her 40s.

I did not recognize any of them. They showed me their ID cards, but it was done so quickly, I could not see their names or any details. The older man said: “Don't be afraid. We are from another department, not the department that detained you.”

It was a plain hotel room. Besides the bed, there was a small table with a chair next to it. They asked me to sit down. The woman sat on one of the two beds, the two men on the other. They wanted me to talk about my work. Again, the older man, who acted like their boss, told me not to worry, after seeing how anxious I looked. These were colleagues of people who had me repeatedly beaten up not long ago. They told me that they just wanted to ask me some questions for background research; they were not going to beat me or arrest me. I just nodded and said nothing.

The younger man reached into his bag and took out a small handheld camera, a professional one. He mounted it onto a small tripod. Seeing the change in my facial expression, the older one said: “Don't worry, this will not be broadcast, and we will not use it as evidence against your friends. But we need to record a video to give to our bosses to show that you are cooperative and willing to tell us what you know.”

The woman took the lead after the camera was turned on and focused on me. She asked me general questions about what kind of help I gave my friends working in rights defence. She made it clear I needed to convince the senior leaders that I am a good person, that I am not a threat to national security. They paused and gave me time to think about what I wanted to say. If they were not satisfied, they told me, they would shoot it again. I was allowed to choose my own words, but I had to keep changing the words until they were happy with them, over and over again.

“I didn't realize that it was wrong to help those people. I didn't intend to hurt China's national interests. I sincerely apologize for anything I did that caused trouble for the government and the country. I don't want to do this work anymore. I just want to have a good family and a peaceful life.”

The older man, the boss, was not happy. "This will not be broadcast or shown to anyone else. You should specify the risks to our country from what they did. This is important and it will determine how the leaders will decide your case. You should take this chance."

We started all over again. I realized that they had lied to me—they wanted to use this video to hurt other people. But I didn't think it was for public use, it seemed too unprofessional. I thought the police would use it against my friends, who I knew were being held.

In the end, the second video didn't leave them any more pleased. They wanted me to say certain people were criminals, but I wouldn't. I could say a lot of things, but I couldn't call someone a criminal. I kept going on about my family, many of whom were dependent on me. I wanted to return to my family, my job, my normal stable life.

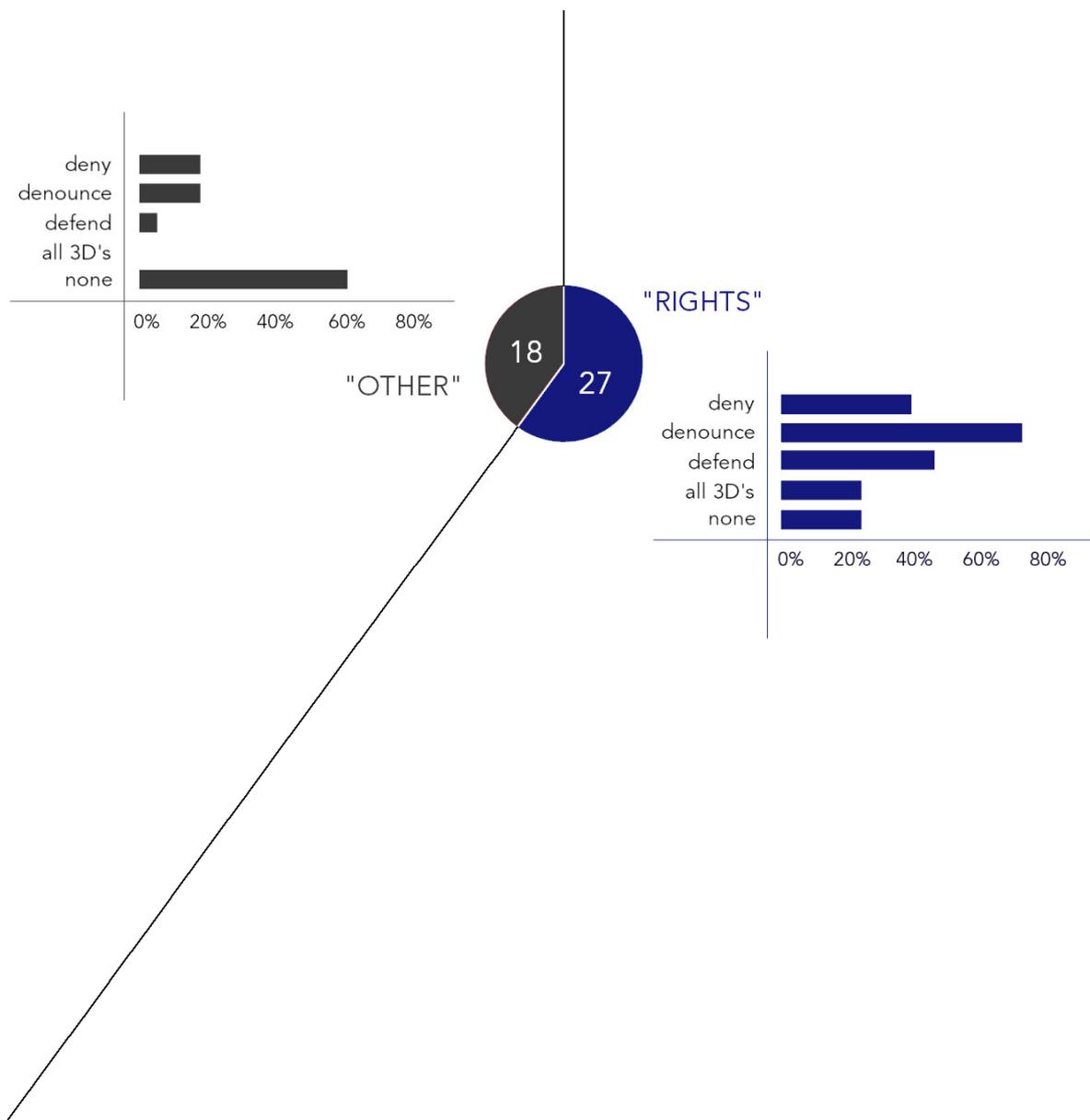
The boss seemed upset, even angry. Just as I was preparing to do the third take, they told me the meeting was over. They ordered me to leave and to make sure to keep quiet about this meeting. They also said they will contact me again. It's been a year now, but I haven't heard from them yet. In the end, the whole thing only took an hour or an hour and a half. As soon as I got back to my office, I wrote down the details of what had just happened.

To this day, I cannot understand why they wanted me to make that video. It's never been broadcast, as far as I know. Perhaps they only wanted to use it against my friends who had been detained. The recording must be sitting somewhere, collecting dust, ready to be used if they ever think it could be useful to discredit me, perhaps, or to ruin my reputation.

DENY – DENOUNCE – DEFEND

Deny, denounce and defend statements (the 3 D's) are significantly more prevalent with "rights" cases than "other" cases. **Six** "rights" cases (22% of all "rights" cases) contain all three of the 3D statements, whereas **none** of the "other" cases did. **11** of the "other" cases (61% of all "other" cases) did not contain any of the 3D statements at all, twice as many as the "rights" cases. **20** of the "rights" cases (74%) contained a denounce statement. This indicates their likely use as a tool to discredit individuals and their profession—human rights lawyers and independent journalists.^{30, 31}

Defend statements are almost non-existent with "other" cases—just a single broadcast (Peter Humphrey's second confession) contains a defend statement, whereas **12** (44%) of the "rights" cases had at least one defend statement. It is possible that making the detainee in a "rights" case make a defend statement is intended as a form of humiliation or submission, because these detainees are often seen as critics of the CCP. A staggering 14 broadcasts (31% of both cases)—that's one in three—of all televised confessions contained a deny statement, indicating the widespread use of the televised confessions as a means of countering criticism.



CONTRADICTIONS

“So there I am, dopey, shocked, in handcuffs in a locked iron chair, inside a locked steel cage inside an interrogation cell surrounded by so-called journalists and police officers poking lenses through the gaps in the cage... I was totally surrounded, with spotlights and lenses poking through. It was quite a horrifying scene.”

Peter Humphrey, corporate investigator

As well as the use of the confessions to deny, denounce and defend and the deployment of supporting confessors to build a case against the target (the main confessor or an off-screen target), there are also several issues with many of the televised confessions that indicate that the confessions are both forced and scripted. These issues are changes in details of the alleged crime, misleading editing and a number of suspects retracting their confession.

Changes in the alleged crime

There were discrepancies between the testimony given in different televised confessions for the same detainee and differences between details given in the televised confession and the testimony in court. For example, reporter Chen Yongzhou said in his October 2013 broadcast that he had accepted a number of payments to print negative stories about construction company Zoomlion, one of which was 500,000 yuan. During his trial, however, he was only accused of accepting bribes of 30,000 yuan in total.¹ In his first August 2013 televised confession, investor and celebrity blogger, Charles Xue (薛必群), admitted to hiring prostitutes, yet in his later two confessions, his “crime” had changed to rumour-mongering on Weibo. Swedish bookseller Gui Minhai made three televised confessions whilst in detention for three different “crimes:” leaving China illegally after a fatal car accident; distributing illegal books on the mainland; and finally for colluding with Sweden to leave China and “violating Chinese laws” (without specifying which ones).

Chen Yongzhou said...he had accepted... 500,000 yuan. During his trial, however, he was only accused of accepting bribes of 30,000 yuan.

At least **five** of the main confessors in this study were tried on different crimes to the ones they were accused of at the time of their television appearance.³² At least another **eight** were released without charge,³³ even though their cases were deemed serious enough to film a confession for television. This high incidence—more than one in five of the 37 main confessors—is an indication that the charges themselves were fabricated and that the public confession was the price paid for freedom.³⁴

Deceptive editing

There were several examples where confession footage was presented as “one interview” but it was clear from the appearance of the confessor that they were taken on separate occasions—something confirmed by the interviewees in this study. In Mr. Gui’s January 2016 confession, the colour of his t-shirt changed from grey to black in different shots as did the

appearance of his hair.³⁵ Shen Hao's (沈灏) November 2014 confession is spliced with footage from his September confession.

The varying quality of the video in different confessions, and also testimony from interviewees in this study, confirmed that confession footage is not always made by professional media companies; it can come from three sources. It is either filmed by the media company (CCTV or other), filmed in-house by the police, or edited from interrogation footage without the suspect's knowledge. The lawyer of blogger Dong Rubin (董如彬), whose confession was broadcast on 17 October 2013 said that it was made without his client's agreement and that he thought the police had likely packaged interrogation footage and given it CCTV. "For the police to do that, it is completely illegal," said Yang Mingkua.³⁶

Retracted confessions

Of the 37 main confessors, five have publicly retracted their confession either through holding a press conference—Lam Wing-kee, interviews with the media—Peter Humphrey and Peter Dahlin, or through their lawyer—Gao Yu (高瑜)³⁷ or family members—Lin Zuluan.³⁸ That number doubles when the interviewees in this study, who also testified that their televised confession was scripted and untrue, are included. Many of those who still live in China are too fearful to speak publicly about the experience to retract their confession.

SCRIPTED AND STAGED

"All of it was choreographed, and the whole thing went on perhaps seven hours, with so many retakes I can't remember for sure."

Wen, human rights defender

China's televised confessions are routinely scripted and staged. Testimony from interviews made for this study³⁹ with people who had appeared in broadcasts described how confessions were choreographed as if they were a TV drama with a "director," "script," "costumes," and "retake after retake" until the "director" was satisfied.

Detainees are dressed in costume

Detainees are routinely made to change their clothes before the confession is filmed. Peter Dahlin was told to shower and put on civilian clothes before the recording took place. Mr. Dahlin, who was being held under RSDL, normally wore grey sweatpants and an orange prison vest. Similarly, Lam Wing-kee was told to change out of his RSDL "uniform," orange vest and "cement-coloured" sweat pants. For his confession, his interrogator had lent him a black winter jacket. Wang Yu, also being held in RSDL, was told to change her clothes before she was driven to the TV studio. Police offered Bao Longjun some different clothes to wear for the recording, but he refused to change.

Peter Humphrey was handed a new prison vest to wear just moments before he was marched off for the "interview." "They brought me a new prison vest, you know these orange prison vests and told me to change into it and said I would be going for this interview. Most of us were wearing very tatty, very filthy vests. It was unusual that someone got given a new one."

Like Mr. Dahlin, Wen was told to shower first and then put on civilian clothes for the recording. "I was told I could shower, even wash my hair, and then put on my own clothes I had been wearing when they detained me."

Detainees learn their lines

Detainees were routinely told what to say during the "confession." That could mean learning lines, reading from a script, or agreeing what to say, usually based on the final "confession statement" hammered out during interrogations.

When Wang Yu was forced to record her first confession following the capture of her son in October 2015 she was told to remember lines that the police had written down. "They wrote down everything that I had to say on a piece of paper asked me to memorise it. I don't remember clearly what it said just that it was about denouncing certain anti-China forces."

For her second confession, when Ms. Wang sat before media and answered questions, she had practiced her answers for days beforehand. "I started practicing the script they [the police] had prepared for me and we rehearsed it many times, almost every day before I left the detention centre."

Mr. Dahlin was handed a photocopied question and answer paper based on the content of his deposition and told to memorise it shortly before the shoot. He had some

leeway over certain sentences. He refused to say certain individuals, named human rights lawyers and activists, were criminals.

Wen, however, was given no such freedom; he was told exactly what to say. "One thing was made clear though, there was no room to bargain. I was to say exactly, word for word, what they decided. There was no debate."

Mr. Lam's script, which he was also asked to commit to memory, was based on his written confession and statement of repentance. He practised first by rehearsing. "All the recordings of the so-called confession were conducted in accordance with the script they gave me which I followed."⁴⁰ If he couldn't remember his lines, they gave him time to help memorise it by writing it out.

"I was to say exactly, word for word, what they decided. There was no debate."
Wen

Mr. Humphrey did not have a script to memorise, but his interrogators told him he should express repentance, apologize to the CCP, and confess. "Ding [his chief interrogator] led the proceedings. He had a script in his hand... Ding's questions were all aimed at getting me to confess, to say I broke the law, to say yes I know I broke the law, I'm very sorry. Forgive me. I was not prepared to do that. I knew that I was innocent, I hadn't broken any law, the law was being bent to fit around me and catch me."

Mr. Bao, who only said a few lines in his confession criticizing the people who tried to help his son flee China, wasn't given a script but was told what to say. "They [the police] didn't write down anything, they just told me what kinds of things I should say."

Chen Taihe (陈泰和)—whose recorded "confession" was not broadcast—said he purposefully tried to slip in phrases that could help him disown the confession if he was ever brought to trial; phrases such as "I didn't intend to do" the alleged crime, but whenever he did, his interrogators made him re-record the confession.

Ming was told he had to confess to a crime that, "I had nothing to do with."

Guo, whose recorded "confession" was not broadcast, remembers how he was allowed to choose his own words but that officers were not happy after the first take. They then ordered Guo to name individuals as criminals. "In the end the second video didn't please them any more than the first."

The confession is heavily directed

The recording is directed by the security agency, media play only a token role, if any. Officers told suspects how to "deliver" their "lines" and multiple retakes were made until they were satisfied.

Police ordered Zhao to cry on camera. "They asked me to sob, choke with tears."

In Mr. Dahlin's televised confession, the CCTV journalist "interviewing" him read from a list of questions she had been given by the police. In fact, the journalist was never seen in the final televised broadcast. Mr. Dahlin's interrogators told him how to "act." "We ran through the seven or eight questions. A few retakes. Sit straighter they said. Speak slower here. Change this here." They made multiple retakes when he stumbled over one line in particular: "I hurt the feelings of the Chinese people."

Despite the huge number of media present at Peter Humphrey's filmed confession, no journalist asked any questions.

Despite the huge number of media present at Mr. Humphrey's filmed confession, no journalist asked any questions, all questions came from his interrogator, Ding. "Whoever they were, the media were not allowed to ask questions."

Mr. Chen remembers that he made at least 10 different recordings of the same confession. "They reviewed it carefully every time until they were satisfied." He was told to look natural and not read from the paper.

Mr. Lam said there were no journalists, as far as he was aware, at his recorded confessions, and his interrogators asked all the questions. He had to make about a dozen recordings, at a number of different locations, one of which was in a basement that had been converted into a mock courthouse, where his main interrogator acted as the judge, his assistant was the deputy judge and a policewoman—whom he had never seen before—changed into plainclothes and pretended to be a "witness."

During Wen's recording, they edited the pre-arranged answers. "Later on, as we would take a break between takes they would add this or change what I was supposed to say." He was also told to change the speed of his voice and they corrected his wording and the expression on his face. Wen's confession onscreen did not last for much more than a minute or two, but the whole thing took hours. "All of it was choreographed, and the whole thing went on perhaps seven hours, with so many retakes I can't remember for sure."

On location

Televised confessions are not always filmed at the detention facility, sometimes the suspect is taken, often black-hooded, to a television studio or an anonymous room where the media is invited which could be within the detention facility or at another location, sometimes far away.

Mr. Dahlin filmed his confession in a room opposite to his cell in the RSDL facility. Wen had his eyes covered and was driven to another location which looked like a hotel. "I was blindfolded and taken down into the basement car park. I have very little recollection of how long we drove, but it felt like a long time, but I also remember being stuck in traffic. By the time my blindfold was removed I was inside a large, two bedroomed hotel suite." Later on, they made another, but this time they filmed it inside a room that was across the corridor from his cell.

"It was almost set up like a mini tribunal."

Peter Humphrey

Zhao was driven to another location and black-hooded. "They drove me to a place, I don't where it was or what it was. They put me in a black hood, so I couldn't see."

Mr. Lam made about a dozen recorded confessions in many different locations. "The recording process took place six or seven times in the room where I was imprisoned, and three times in another place where they took me there in a 7-seater car. After leaving the building, the drive took about 45 minutes, passing through an express highway and ending up in a big complex with many low-rise houses." In at least one instance, the set-up for the filming was like a court-room, complete with a "witness."

Mr. Bao did his two short pieces to camera in the room he was living in when detained under RSDL. His interrogations also routinely took place in the same room. Only his interrogator and a few officers were in the room when the recording took place. The quality of the footage, both sound and picture, is very poor on the CCTV broadcast.

Ms. Wang and Wu Gan (吴淦) were both black-hooded and driven to the television studio for their “confession;” both refused to cooperate.

lam wing-kee



CREDIT: HONG KONG FREE PRESS. LAM WING-KEE SPEAKS AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN HONG KONG, JUNE 2016

Lam Wing-kee, one of the five Hong Kong booksellers, was disappeared as he crossed the border at Shenzhen in late 2015. His next appearance was on Phoenix TV in February 2016 in a televised confession. Mr. Lam was held in RSDL for several months and then released on bail but confined to a small city in Guangdong. In June 2016, he was allowed to return to Hong Kong provided he would return to China with computer hardware from the bookshop. Instead, Mr. Lam held an explosive press conference in Hong Kong where he revealed how the televised confessions were coerced and scripted.

I was alone and helpless. I am not sure if it was the endless interrogations or infinite custody without charge that made me start to consider suicide in just three months. Whenever I looked carefully, I could see that the four walls were covered with soft padding. Obviously, any attempt to break my neck by knocking against the wall would not work. The ceiling was close to 20 feet high, and there was no way I could twist my pants into a rope to hang myself. There was a big inaccessible window, with iron bars blocked by barbed wire which could not be pried open with one's bare hands. The shower head, installed high up, was arc-shaped and nothing could be hung on it. The more one looked at the set-up of the room, the more one got frightened because, clearly, long-term solitary confinement and isolation must have resulted in a nervous breakdown for somebody and led to suicide in the past. All the measures in the room were aimed at preventing suicide. I was probably in such a state of mind when the idea of suicide came up. I think I did not feel too frightened of death itself because, after all, every person must die. It is the fear of death that I feared...

Around the middle of January 2016, they brought a document for me to read. It was a letter of confession regarding a charge against me: "selling books illegally." The letter head read The People's Republic of China. The date - in year, month and day - was given at the bottom. I held my head up. The assistant staff wanted me to sign, similar to the day when I was imprisoned in Ningbo and they asked to sign those statements of giving up my rights. I thought that since I had signed on the previous occasion, there was no way not to sign this time although I knew that such a method was illegal. Fine. Upon signing, Mr. Shi [his chief interrogator] had a more relaxed expression on his face...

Several days later, I was asked to write a letter of remorse. Actually, I had not committed any crime. I did not know how to write such a letter. Somehow, I began like this: "Because I have committed a crime, I now sincerely express regret to the Chinese government ...". With difficulty I waffled on and managed to fill up an A4 sheet. The next day the assistant staff came to take the sheet away, probably to be handed to Mr. Shi for inspection. I thought my half-hearted confession would work. I went to the window and viewed the sky again. The opposite building was visible from this side. Sometimes I gave the excuse of using the toilet and tip-toed on the raised step of the squat toilet to look outside. I counted 20 big windows on the opposite building. It had five 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. Later, when they arranged to make video recordings of me, I was moved to another room along the corridor. There, I could see that next to another building at the back was also a small hill. I reckoned that I was detained in a place surrounded by hills on three sides. Misty in the morning and at night, it should be a basin...

Around January to February, I signed the letters of confession and remorse. I thought the case would soon be over...

By then the confession videos had already been taken.

It wasn't the TV station that wanted me to do the TV confession, it was my interrogators. And as far as I know, these TV interviews were broadcast not only on Phoenix TV, but also on CCTV. I made about a dozen [recorded] confessions... Throughout there were no journalists, all questions to me were asked by [those] who were interrogating me. I had to answer according to what they wanted [me to say], among them at the last moment one of the guys who had been guarding me was brought in to ask questions too (later I learned that he was a trainee cop, really young, about 20 years old).

The recording process took place six or seven times in the room where I was imprisoned, and three times in another place where they took me there in a seven-seater car. After leaving the building, the drive took about 45 minutes, passing through an express highway and ending up in a big complex with many low-rise houses. **All the recording of the so-called confession was conducted in accordance with the script they gave me which I followed. Mr. Shi doubled as the director...** Every time a confession was filmed, there were three or four people present, apart from my two interrogators [one was Mr. Shi]. The questions were first drafted up, and then I had to memorise them... The [material] was all taken from my written confession and statement of repentance. It was Mr Shi who gave me [the black jacket], for the confession recording.

The weirdest incident happened on one occasion when I was taken to a building. After getting out of the car in the carpark, there was a staircase. Probably to save trouble, they removed my eye mask to let me walk the stairs myself. After getting down to the lowest floor and along the passage way, a policewoman walked past by, facing me directly. On her shoulder was the badge of Ningbo Public Security Bureau... **[The room] was made up to look like a courtroom; a Mr. Xing acted as the judge, sitting to his side was his assistant playing the part of the deputy judge... I took the prisoner seat.** While preparations were being made for the recording, the policewoman came in too, having changed into civilian clothing, and sat by the wall. "Miss Fong?" asked Mr. Shi, who was seated in an interrogator's stand like that in court. The policewoman nodded. He opened the document on the desk and briefly examined it. Then he said it was fine for Miss Fong to remain seated. She nodded. The camera was turned on by the assistant at the back and with the two sitting side by side, questions and answers progressed in sequence, following prior rehearsal. When recording was finished, I asked Mr. Shi out of curiosity, "What was the seated lady doing there?" He removed the recording equipment and answered me at the same time, "She is a witness." I could not withhold my surprise. She was undoubtedly a policewoman, with no connection to my case whatsoever. They found themselves a so-called witness just like that? It was utterly unbelievable how reckless they were, not to mention that the case had been handled in an unlawful manner all along.

I could not help worrying because of what happened afterwards. For the purpose of making an application for bail, a remorse video had been made. It was submitted to Beijing along with the letter of remorse. While waiting for news about the outcome, one day I heard Mr. Shi say that the higher authority was not satisfied. What was to be done? I was terribly anxious. If no approval was forthcoming, I would be in jail for the Chinese New Year. Several days later, further news was heard. Beijing would send people here. To observe me, it was said. Right away I felt that it was ominous. One afternoon, two persons came in. I was squatting by the toilet and washing clothes. I hurriedly returned to my seat. I waited till they were seated. I was about to sit down when one of them suddenly banged the table and said I was not allowed to sit. I was startled and had to remain standing. The other person started to talk, "Do you know who we are?" I shook my head, still in shock. Then the other person banged the table also. "We belong to the Central Task Force from Beijing. The kind of books you publish defame our national leaders. People like you are vicious to the extreme, not worthy of pardon. We can impose proletariat dictatorship over you for ten, twenty years, even till death. No one in Hong Kong knows. We can even pinch you to death like a bug." I was dumbfounded by such a sudden abusive outburst and did not know what to do. I could only stare blankly, incapable of any reaction but to let them continue their rounds of relentless

cursing. I had no idea how long the outbursts lasted. I kept standing there. Not until two guards entered later did I realize that they had left. Very clearly, release on bail was out of the question.

Let's make another video; write another letter of remorse, said Mr. Shi later. So the video was remade, and a letter of remorse written again for submission. By then the Chinese New Year was drawing near. Mr. Shi knew I was so worried that I suffered from insomnia. Maybe he wanted to help. He showed a friendly gesture. I am not sure if it was due to similarity in our sentiments or interests, or whether there was some other reason. I understood that he was following orders to interrogate me. He was a little sympathetic towards me, hoping that I could get released on bail. Later, he even said to me that he would be ready to ... be my guarantor, as long as I cooperated in the future. At that time I had no choice but to believe him.

WHY CONFESS?

"I was alone and helpless. I am not sure if it was the endless interrogations or infinite custody without charge that made me start to consider suicide in just three months."

Lam Wing-kee, Hong Kong bookseller

Suspects are routinely coerced with threats or promises into making a televised confession. Promises ranged from earlier release to more lenient treatment; threats were made against the detainee and, sometimes, to the detainee's great anguish, family members. In addition, detainees are in a state of fear and helplessness, especially when held under RSDL with no access to a lawyer and routinely subjected to mental and physical torture.

Promises

Peter Dahlin, Peter Humphrey, Wen and Zhao all said the promise of lenient treatment (including early release) was one of the reasons why they agreed to "confess" on camera. Often, interrogators would urge the suspect to make a filmed confession but did not say or even denied that it would be put on television. They routinely framed it as something to give their "superiors" or "bosses" (领导) as a way to show that the detainee was cooperating and thus enable the authorization of more favourable treatment.

Mr. Dahlin said he believed he might have died in captivity because he suffers from Addison's disease, a condition where stress can trigger a coma and even death, and that was one of the reasons he agreed.

Mr. Humphrey remembered the police officer promising more lenient treatment if he agreed to meet with the media. "As I was resisting they said if I cooperated with them it would mean more lenient treatment or we would view your case more favourably, which of course turned out to be completely untrue."

Several weeks after being put into RSDL, Wen was shown transcripts the police said were from videoed confessions that other detained colleagues had made. His interrogator "showed me a transcript of what they had said, and although he did not give me enough time to read much of it, it was nonetheless clear: record the video, and you might get released. No video, no release."

Zhao said the police told him he would be released on bail or released after trial if he agreed to confess on camera. They did not keep their promise as Zhao was not freed until many months later.

Li, who refused to give a recorded confession, said police constantly harassed him to make one. "Police officers... just used a DV camera and asked me to confess and said they will give it to their leader. If my attitude is good, they will release me."

Chen Taihe (陈泰和), whose confession video was never broadcast, initially refused when police urged him to record a confession and promised him lenient treatment in return. He knew that lawyer Liu Jianjun (刘建军) had made a confession a few weeks earlier and was still detained so at first he did not trust them. However, after several weeks, he changed his

mind. His treatment had improved and he learnt that they had allowed his wife to leave China. He thought he would have a chance of going free if he cooperated.

Threats

One of the most powerful weapons Chinese police have in securing a forced televised confession is to threaten family members of the detainee—this reprehensible tactic was used for several of the interviewees in this study. Ming said he agreed to be filmed after the police told him they had detained one of his close family members and that they would only be released if Ming confessed on camera.

Bao Longjun described how after weeks of being held in RSDL he agreed to go on television to blame “anti-China” forces for trying to smuggle his son out of the country after police showed him pictures of his son looking like he was in detention.⁴¹ They told him they would release his son provided he made the video. The whole affair put him into shock. “This was the first news I had had of my son for three months. The photo was the kind taken when you enter a detention centre. I had also made one under strict supervision when I entered the Tianjin Detention Centre. When I saw the photo of my son, my tears flew uncontrollably. I was numb. Mechanically, I followed their instructions to denounce... I don’t even remember what I said.”

Wang Yu’s situation was complicated but the overriding reason she gave her televised confessions was so that she could save her son. The first time, in October 2015, the police told her that she had to repeat lines they made her memorise on camera or her son would not be set free—like her in her husband’s case, they showed her photos of him in detention after being captured trying to flee the country. Before she agreed to the second televised appearance, the police had told her many times that her son would not be allowed out of the country and she would not be allowed to go free until she recorded a confession. She knew the only way to see her son and help him go overseas to study was to confess on camera. “So, this is my story. I don’t expect everyone to understand. I just want to say that my child is everything to me. And, perhaps, in my situation, I had no other choice.”

Mr. Dahlin said state security officers holding him told him that they would keep his girlfriend in RSDL until his case was resolved. They made it clear that making the recording would mean he would either be moved into pre-trial detention or he would be released, and then, and only then, would his girlfriend be released.

To illustrate the degree to which police instil fear in a victim, take the case of Guo. In a previous interview Guo gave to Safeguard Defenders, he talked about the police beatings he endured when he was detained just a few weeks before he was harassed to record a video. As they beat him, the police threatened that unless he cooperated with them they would kill him and his family would never know what had happened to him.

In testimony given to his lawyers,^{42,43} Xie Yang described how police had tortured him and threatened to harm his family during the course of his incarceration in RSDL and in detention. It was after enduring this kind of treatment for months that Mr. Xie appeared in two televised confessions later in 2017. “Your wife is a professor at Hunan University—surely she must have ‘economic problems’? If you don’t cooperate, we might be forced to expand

“Your wife is a professor at Hunan University—surely she must have ‘economic problems’? If you don’t cooperate, we might be forced to expand this matter. If you don’t come clean and explain things clearly, we’ll go after your wife without a doubt.”

Police to Xie Yang

this matter. If you don't come clean and explain things clearly, we'll go after your wife without a doubt," police told Mr. Xie. They went on to threaten his brother, his nephew and even his daughter, a student in middle school.

Stress and torture

The use of torture to extract confessions in China is something which has been well documented by human rights organizations, scholars and even officially accepted by China itself.⁴⁴ In its November 2015 report, *No end in sight: torture and forced confessions in China*, Amnesty International wrote: "Whether primarily through lack of awareness or through lack of will, the Chinese authorities are failing to implement the recent laws and regulations aimed at curbing the use of confessions extracted through torture. As a result, there has yet been very little improvement in eradicating **the pervasive use of torture in the Chinese criminal justice system.**" Torture is especially prevalent when the detainee is kept in RSDL because there is little or no custodial oversight—lawyers and family members are almost always denied access.

Detainees are kept in conditions that create immense stress and feelings of fear. When the power asymmetry is so sharp, when the detainee is under such duress, and where there is no recourse to appeal, few would feel strong enough to refuse if approached to make a "confession." Detainees are regularly sleep deprived; overhead lights are kept switched on 24 hours a day in both detention centres and in RSDL facilities. Suspects are routinely interrogated for hours on end when they are exhausted from lack of sleep. Those kept in RSDL are also subjected to the extra stress of solitary confinement.

Lam Wing-kee wrote that he made his confessions because he couldn't *not* make them. "I wasn't interviewed I was 'being' interviewed." In detention, all the power is in the hands of the police or state security. "I was in a state of fear."⁴⁵ Mr. Lam said the experience of solitary confinement was so intense that he considered suicide. "I was alone and helpless," he wrote.⁴⁶ "Whenever I looked carefully, I could see that the four walls were covered with soft padding. Obviously, any attempt to break my neck by knocking against the wall would not work. The ceiling was close to 20 feet high, and there was no way I could twist my pants into a rope to hang myself. There was a big inaccessible window, with iron bars blocked by barbed wire which could not pried open with one's bare hands. The shower head, installed high up, was arc-shaped and nothing could be hung on it. The more one looked at the set-up of the room, the more one got frightened because, clearly, long-term solitary confinement and isolation must have resulted in a nervous breakdown for somebody and led to suicide in the past."

Zhao, who was held for over a year, suffered frequent interrogations, was beaten, and forced to take unidentified medicine. These continued even after he had given his recorded confession.

Lawyer Sui Muqing (隋牧青) whose testimony about his experience in RSDL was used for another Safeguard Defender's publication,⁴⁷ was forced to record a confession that was never aired. Police torture him first by preventing him from sleeping for five or six days straight. "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." He said that experience, the threat of more torture and the promise of freedom persuaded him to make the videoed confession. "The police finally told me the purpose of the torture: they

wanted me to confess. If I didn't confess, they threatened to bind me in handcuffs and hang me from the window railing. It is said even the strongest person can only hold on for five minutes. If I confessed, I would be released."

Mr. Humphrey said he was not in a fit enough mental state to agree. "I wasn't comfortable with doing it at all. But when you're in that situation, you've been under duress for such a long time, if something appears that it might possibly be a lifeline, or half a lifeline, or a means to mitigate circumstances then you clutch at them."

Li, who resisted giving a recorded confession, described interrogation sessions as torturous. "While I was detained, I underwent a lot of 'brainwashing' types of questioning and sent for interrogation more than 70 times. They would take it in turns to interrogate me; mainly this took the form of mental torture and interrogating me when I was exhausted. They threatened that if I did not cooperate with them, they would sentence me to jail time, I'd lose my job, my family would leave me, I'd be ruined for the rest of my life. I was only 39 years old, my hair turned white with the enormous pressure and torture of it all."

Just weeks before police grabbed him to make a videoed confession, Guo had been detained, held in solitary confinement and beaten. When the police called him after his release and asked to meet him, he panicked. "I had been severely beaten in detention when I didn't answer the way they wanted."

Ms. Wang, who was held in RSDL in solitary confinement, said for hours on end she was confined into a 40x40cm square painted on the floor of her cell. At other times, they painfully shackled her feet and hands. They swelled up and a year later she could still see black marks on her wrists left by the cuffs. "I couldn't stand it anymore. While they were still trying to persuade me to speak with them, I slowly felt my heart constrict, my breath became short, I felt dizzy. My body couldn't hold out any more. It was so painful I felt like I was going to die. My consciousness was slowly slipping away. My body fell from the chair. Even while I was weak and lying limply on the floor, they didn't plan to stop the torture." ⁴⁸

"They had resorted to severe beatings to get me to say what they wanted me to say"

Guo

Mr. Xie told his lawyers that he was severely tortured during his detention under RSDL. He was beaten, shackled, sleep deprived and tortured in a "dangling chair" for up to 20 hours a day.⁴⁹ After three days of such treatment, he had a complete mental breakdown. When his tormentors arrived, because he was already in such a disturbed mental state, he began to cry." Xie also gave his lawyer a handwritten note saying that any confession he made would be because he had been coerced. Months and weeks later, the two televised confessions he was forced to give in 2017, which this study categorises as deny confessions, has him claiming he was never tortured.

As the case of Mr. Xie illustrates, some detainees give a televised confession only after many months of intense physical and mental torture. Conditions are so extreme that RSDL facilities are suicide-proofed with the removal of all sharp objects (such as toothbrushes) and the padding of hard surfaces. Under such conditions, the promise of better treatment is relative.

Denial of lawyer access

Police denied detainees the opportunity to discuss the televised confession with a lawyer. Those kept under RSDL and suspected of national security crimes can legally be denied

lawyer access, whereas for those kept in detention centres, police would routinely obstruct access.

Mr. Humphrey had seen a lawyer a couple of times before he was asked to “meet the media,” but he was not given the opportunity to consult with a lawyer about this issue. He also said that the police routinely made it difficult for his lawyers to talk with him by arranging full-day interrogation sessions on the days he was supposed to meet with them.

Ming also said he had no access to a lawyer to discuss the confession. Ms. Wang was told that if she tried to ask for a lawyer, the police would simply arrest them. Mr. Dahlin, held on state security charges, had no access to a lawyer. Early on in his detention, Mr. Lam was forced to sign away his rights for the police to notify his family and his right to hire a lawyer.

Mr. Chen said police made lawyer access difficult for him but he did manage to see two lawyers whilst he was in detention but strongly suspected the first lawyer was a police informer. He did not have access to a lawyer before making the videoed confession, when he was held in RSDL.

LIES AND VIDEOTAPE

“They filmed it secretly, they edited it, and they put it on TV without my knowledge; it was a big scam.”

Ming, human rights defender

Police were routinely deceptive about the recorded confessions both in terms of concealing that it would be put on television and in manipulating the recording during the editing process.

Police deception

Peter Dahlin said he was told only “judges” would view the video to decide whether to release him or prosecute him. He only realised it was going out on television when he walked into the room and came face-to-face with the CCTV cameraman and a female journalist.

Peter Humphrey insisted beforehand—and put it in writing—that he would only talk to print journalists. Yet on the day he met the press, he was surrounded by television and print cameras. “I was ambushed by a gang of people with cameras—I hesitate to say journalists with cameras—some of them had still cameras and some of them had film cameras. I was actually quite shocked because I was not expecting anything like that at all.”

Perhaps anticipating he might be upset at the deception, the morning of the “interview” they gave Mr. Humphrey a sedative (he sometimes took one in the evening to help him sleep). That was the first time he had been medicated in the morning. He said the drug made him “dopey.”

Zhao was not told that his confession recording would go on television, just that it was for a “department higher up” to watch. He only realized it had been broadcast after he was released. “I only knew about it after I got home and my friends and relatives told me.”

Ming said he did not know the recorded confession would be put on television, he was told only that it would be given to the police chief. It was half a year later, when he was allowed to meet with a lawyer, that he learned about the broadcast. “They filmed it secretly, they edited it, and they put it on TV without my knowledge; it was a big scam.”

Police told Bao Longjun the recording would only be given to the police in Yunnan who were in charge of his son. “They said Yunnan police asked them to assist in the case. They said if the parents make a video to denounce this action and if they think the parents are sincere, then they would let my son free. They said very clearly that I should look into the camera, speak some words that my interrogators told me to say, and that it would be for the Yunnan PSB.”

Wang Yu, Mr. Bao’s wife, was also told her video was just for the PSB and it would not be put on television. To convince her they said: “Look you can see that we’re not putting you on television, if we were, we would be using a professional camera.” But the footage, even though it was very poor quality, was aired. “This was how my first televised interview happened,” Ms. Wang wrote. “I did not know at the time that it would be put on television,

it wasn't until I was released and allowed to go back to Ulanhot, that my parents and my friends told me about it. [The police] broke their promise about not putting it on television."

Security officers did not inform Wen that the recording was for broadcast on television, he only realised when he had been driven, blindfolded, to the location of the shooting, a hotel suite. "It became clear that this was something else altogether, that this was to be yet another forced confession TV show."

Li, who resisted pressure to make a recorded confession said: "Televised confessions are made without the knowledge of the detainees... police officers trick you into trusting them to take a recording, but there's no TV reporter, the police send the tapes over to the TV station to edit and then broadcast."

peter humphrey

CCTV NEWS

ENTN

**PETER HUMPHREY
SUSPECT**

**NEWS
HOUR**

CREDIT: ALEXEY GARMASH. ARTIST RENDERING OF CCTV9 SCREENSHOT OF PETER HUMPHREY'S TELEVISED CONFESSION.

Peter Humphrey was a British corporate investigator based in Shanghai when he was detained in July 2013 along with his American wife with whom he had founded risk consultancy ChinaWhys. His case has been linked to that of British pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline, whose China operations were entangled in a corruption scandal at the same time.

Mr. Humphrey's first televised confession came shortly after he was charged on 16 August 2013, accused of illegally obtaining personal data. He was sentenced to 2.5 years in jail in August 2014, considered an unusually harsh penalty for this charge. He was released six months early in 2015 on medical grounds.

Saturday 24 August 2013: Police ask Peter to do a 'media' interview

The day after Ying's [his wife's] birthday on the 24 August, which was a Saturday, two of my PSB interrogators, came and I was summoned to an interrogation. This was most unusual, you know, because they never used to come on Saturdays. The fact that they came on a Saturday suggests there was some kind of emergency; they'd been ordered to come...

They had come to proposition me or ask me to do this media interview. The officer who presented this to me was one of the two lead questioners who had interrogated me over the preceding six weeks. He was the one who played the "good cop" role. There was another one who played the "bad cop" role. The guy who came to propose this, his name was Ding Zhidong. He is a Chief Inspector from within the Third Brigade of the Shanghai CID. He was accompanied by another police officer whose name was Huang Xian, who played a secondary role in the interrogations. These two guys were the same two guys who raided our house in Beijing, while other officers were raiding our other office in Shanghai.

Officer Ding said to me: "Peter, there's been a lot of media coverage on your case, and our bosses want you to 'meet the media,'" and so we discussed this a bit. I was uncomfortable with the whole idea, knowing what the Chinese propaganda machine was like. So, I asked who would it be, how many would it be, what kind of media would it be, and so on. They said they wanted to take pictures, and film it and I said I can't accept that. They said we can blur your image, but I said I don't want any film, any images at all. I'm willing to meet two or three print journalists. **At the end of this short meeting they asked if I would write something to show I agreed and I wrote that I agreed to meet several journalists, no pictures, no filming. And I signed that.**

I wasn't comfortable with doing it at all. But when you're in that situation, you've been under duress for such a long time, if something appears that it might possibly be a lifeline, or half a lifeline, or a means to mitigate circumstances then you clutch at them. But I certainly did not accept the concept of a lot of journalists, cameramen, **I did not accept it, I made that very clear and I wrote it down.**

I was resisting [and] they said if I cooperated with them it would mean more lenient treatment or we would view your case more favourably, which of course turned out to be completely untrue.

Monday 26 August 2013: The police come to get Peter

I was suffering a lot from physical pain because I had a whiplash injury of some sort from when the police raided us and kicked the door into my face. It had injured my neck and my back and I was in a lot of pain. Of course, I had a lot of anxiety, panic attacks and so on and sleeplessness. And so I had managed to persuade them to give me a sleeping pill from time to time; they only gave me a tiny dose.

On that Monday morning, the doctor who patrolled the detention centre, who was a civilian contractor, came and gave me a sedative, to calm me down. It would make me very dopey. And I took it. I would take anything that would help to calm me down. That was totally unusual [because the sedative was usually only given in the evenings].

Not long after that they brought me a new prison vest, you know those orange prison vests and told me to change into it. Usually, we were wearing very tatty, very filthy vests. It was unusual that someone got given a new one.

Shortly after that they came and brought me out. Normally when you are taken out of your cell you are taken out by one warden, [that day] there were four or five. The detention centre had its own propaganda department, sometimes the wardens would film things that would happen in the detention centre. They were there just to film me coming out of the cell door, I think.

"I was ambushed by a gang of people with cameras..."

Our cell block had a long corridor.... Come out, turn left, cross an indoor bridge, which brings you to another block, with a door on either end. When we went through the second door of the bridge, **I was ambushed by a gang of people with cameras**—I hesitate to say journalists with cameras—some of them had still cameras and some of them had film cameras.

This shocked me. It was clear they had not respected my wishes, even though they told me that they would.

So, they led me down this corridor which was where I normally went for my interrogations. There are interrogation cells lining both sides of that corridor. I went further down the corridor than I had been before, to a room on the left which was a much larger interrogation room than normal.

The farce of the 'media' interview.

It was almost set up like a mini tribunal. There was a fairly large podium with a long bench and a number of officers sat behind it.

In the centre of the room was a cage with steel bars and inside the cage was a seat with a cross bar that locks across your lap. I was in handcuffs and wearing this orange prison vest but I had not been convicted of any crime. I was made to sit in this locked chair in this steel cage and the gang of so-called journalists and quite a number of police officers basically surrounded it. These police officers included Ding, another officer of similar rank, who was the second lead interrogator, he was surnamed Bao, and another officer called Lv Wei who appears in some Chinese media footage about our case.

Ding led the proceedings. He had a script in his hand. The police officers were all in uniform on this occasion; previously I had never seen them in uniform [usually they wore civilian clothes].

So there I am, dopey, shocked, in handcuffs in a locked iron chair, inside a locked steel cage inside an interrogation cell surrounded by so-called journalists and police officers poking lenses through the gaps in the cage... I was totally surrounded, with spotlights and lenses poking through. It was quite a horrifying scene.

Then Ding basically read out questions from his script. I was very, very awkward, I was deliberately awkward and involuntarily awkward as well because of my physical and mental state. I was caged. What goes through your mind when you are sitting in a cage like that? What's going to happen next? It's like trying to balance on a tightrope. Trying to be reasonable but also not confessing to things you didn't do, which I was being pressured to do. It was very, very difficult.

[This televised confession] figures very high in my post-traumatic stress disorder syndrome. **It is one of these horror moments that often comes back to me and upsets me even now.**

Ding's questions were all aimed at getting me to confess, to say I broke the law, to say yes I know I broke the law, I'm very sorry. Forgive me. I was not prepared to do that. I

knew that I was innocent, I hadn't broken any law, the law was being bent to fit around me and catch me.

So, a lot of my responses during this cage interview were attempts to rebut any suggestion that we had violated the law.

The media were not allowed to ask questions. I believe that one of them may have been from CCTV.

My recollection is that I used conditionals, I was in this cage I was under duress I was being treated like a caged animal, not knowing when I would be let out, what I believe I said was: If I had violated the law and such and such that I did so unknowingly and I'm sorry. But there's no way that I ever said: "Yes I know I broke the law." **The little clips that I've seen are almost unrecognizable to me.**

Around 20 minutes later, Peter is led back to his cell.

I felt totally humiliated and crushed.

Ding escorted me [back out] to the end of that particular corridor. He put his arm over my shoulder and I felt so disgusted. He knew that I was shaking, that I was angry, and I think he knew he had committed a crime against me.

I believe they deceptively edited everything I said that morning.

I had absolutely no chance to see a lawyer to discuss whether or not to do the interview and this was probably timed quite deliberately to make sure that I couldn't. This propaganda exercise was clearly linked to the charges [that were laid on the 16 August].

It bears no semblance with reality. And the conditions in which this interview took place were nothing short of torture.

After this interview I felt totally humiliated and crushed. I felt totally wronged. They had cheated me very explicitly; treated me like an animal... I realised then the significance of having given me that sedative. You feel helpless.

Deceptive editing

The confession recording is always edited so that the true nature of how it is made is concealed and it is often edited to misrepresent meaning, particularly for those detainees who are not given “lines” to “read” or “memorise.”

Mr. Humphrey endured one of the worst examples of deceptive editing. The footage on national television is a close up of his head and shoulders, but in reality he was handcuffed, locked into a chair and locked into a locked cage. “So there I am, dopey, shocked, in handcuffs in a locked iron chair, inside a locked steel cage inside an interrogation cell surrounded by so-called journalists and police officers poking lenses through the gaps in the cage... I was totally surrounded, with spotlights and lenses poking through. It was quite a horrifying scene.” None of that is seen on screen.

The footage itself can also be deceptively edited. Mr. Humphrey described how he believes his words were edited to make it seem as if he was confessing on camera. “My recollection is that I used conditionals, I was in this cage, I was under duress, I was being treated like a caged animal, not knowing when I would be let out. What I believe I said was: If I had violated the law and such and such that I did so unknowingly and I’m sorry. But there’s no way that I ever said: “Yes I know I broke the law.” The little clips that I’ve seen are almost unrecognizable to me.”

“So there I am, dopey, shocked, in handcuffs in a locked iron chair, inside a locked steel cage inside an interrogation cell surrounded by so-called journalists and police officers poking lenses through the gaps in the cage...”

Forced filming

When suspects refuse to make a confession, the police routinely keep up the pressure either by continually filming them or forcibly taking them to a television studio.

Li described how he was filmed constantly, he thinks to make enough footage that could be used on television. “They [the police] filmed the entirety from searching my home to taking me on the train, and during the whole train journey to ensure that as soon as I made a confession, they could use it in a public broadcast.” Li intentionally spoiled any footage being usable by answering questions with another question.

In the first attempt to get her to confess on camera, Ms. Wang was driven, black-hooded to a TV studio. “Chief Wang came into my cell after I had changed. He said he was taking me for my television confession. I was very angry, ‘I told you I would not record anything or go on television!’ He didn’t care. He just put a black hood over my head and, at least this time, he took me without putting me in handcuffs. In the car, I demanded again and again to be taken back. I told them I definitely wouldn’t go on television. If they wanted to force me, I threatened to jump out of the car. Chief Wang maliciously told me to go ahead.” She was driven to a television studio, but she refused to speak on camera.

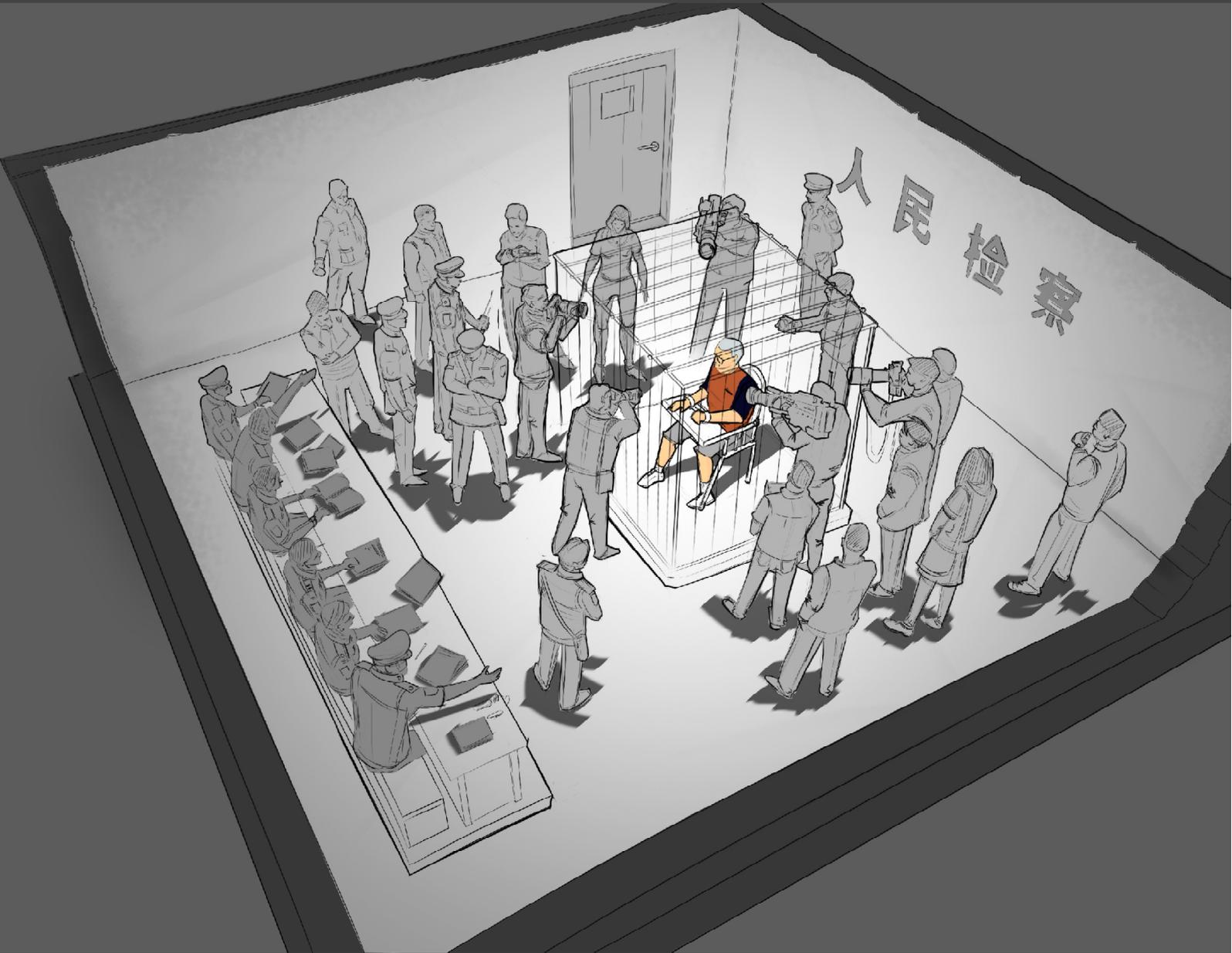
Police made similar attempts with rights activist Wu Gan. Mr. Wu, who was disappeared in May 2015, one the first 709 activists to go missing, released an open letter through his lawyer in March 2017,⁵⁰ detailing a failed attempt to force him to make a televised confession at a CCTV studio. An extract from the letter is reproduced below.⁵¹

I want you [Dong Qian, the CCTV journalist at the confession] to tell the world about how I was hauled, a black hood covering my head, in front of you for an interview on August 1, 2015. Please gather your courage and conscience, and tell the public what you saw on that day. Tell everyone how I rebuked An Shaodong (安少东, security agent and interrogator) who sat diagonally from me. Tell the public what he did to me. Tell them about my back injury.

“Tell them how actors were brought in to act out a script for the televised confession. I trust that you’ll show the kind-hearted side of your nature. I’m sorry that you didn’t get what you had come for because I refused to act according to their script. For my disobedience, I was punished badly by An Shaodong after being taken back to the detention center.

“An Shaodong sat diagonally from me to intimidate me. I experienced for myself the inside process by which CCTV makes its news pieces, and how the station and the public security organs work hand in hand to create the news they need.” Wu Gan.

the recording of peter humphrey's confession



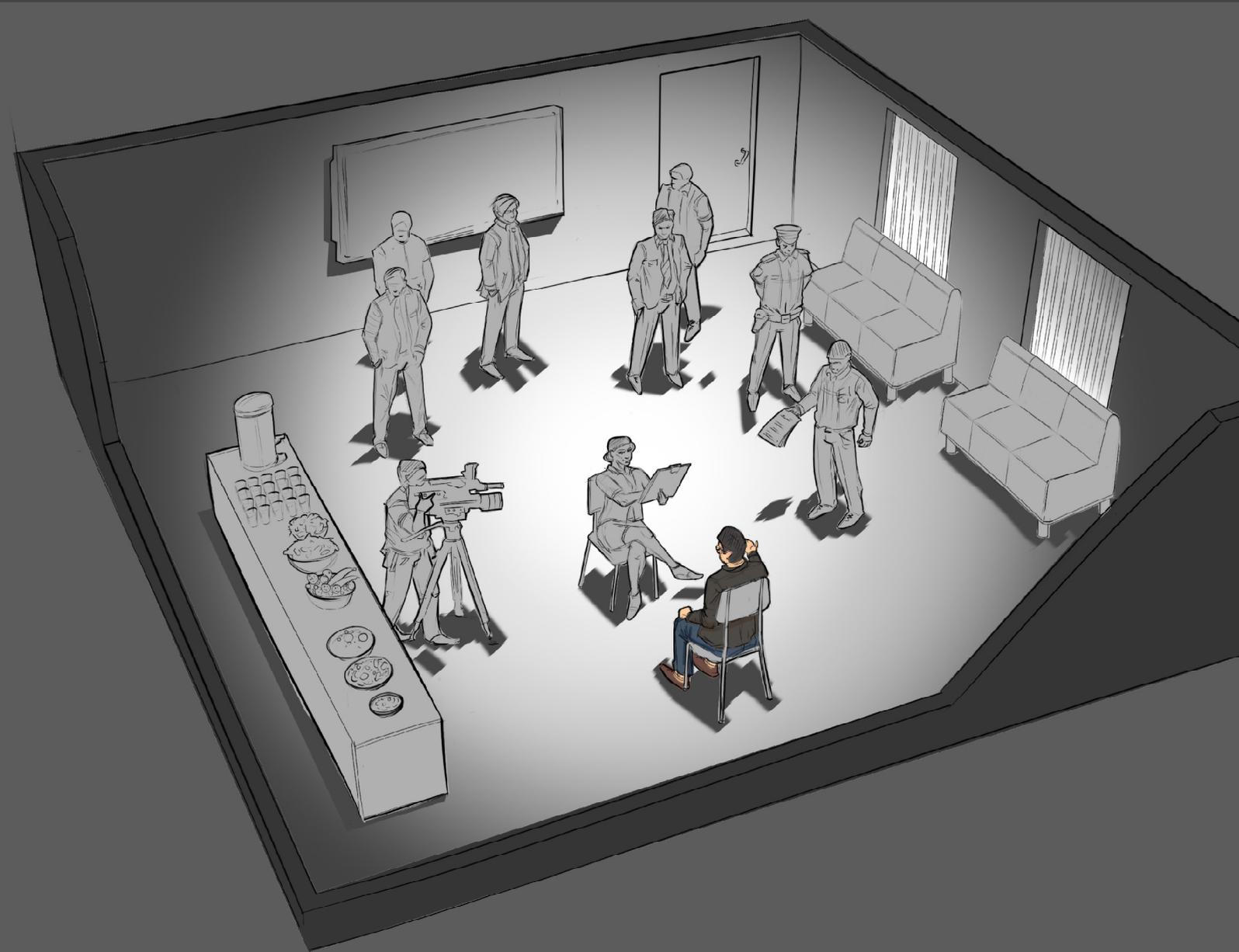
CREDIT: ALEXEY GARMASH. ARTIST IMPRESSION OF HOW PETER HUMPHREY'S FIRST TELEVISED CONFESSION WAS SET UP.



CREDIT: SCREENSHOT FROM CCTV9.

After having been drugged, Peter Humphrey was taken into an interrogation room, locked into a chair, handcuffed, and placed inside a metal cage, while reporters swarmed around, poking their cameras through the bars. None of the reporters asked any questions, only the chief interrogator. On television, we only see the upper portion of Mr. Humphrey's body.

the recording of peter dahlin's confession



CREDIT: ALEXEY GARMASH. ARTIST IMPRESSION OF HOW PETER DAHLIN'S TELEVISED CONFESSION WAS SET UP.



CREDIT: SCREENSHOT FROM CCTV13.

Peter Dahlin made his interview in a room opposite his cell in the custom-built facility he was held under RSDL. The journalist, who is not seen or heard in the broadcast, read from a list of questions given to her, while Peter repeated the answers he had been told to memorise. One of his interrogators directed the scene, while State Security officers milled about. On television we only see Mr. Dahlin alone in a plain room.

CONSEQUENCES

"It is one of these horror moments that often comes back to me and upsets me even now."

Peter Humphrey, corporate investigator

Those who have appeared in China's televised confessions describe it as an intensely distressing and humiliating experience. If they are forced to denounce others, it can mean they lose trust and status in their community. The televised confessions also cause great anguish to family members and friends.

More than four years on, Peter Humphrey is still traumatised by the experience. "[The televised confession] figures very high in my post-traumatic stress disorder syndrome. It is one of these horror moments that often comes back to me and upsets me even now."

When Wang Yu wrote her testimony for this report, she struggled for a long time. "It is difficult to explain, why I went on television, what kind of mental process I had gone through. And until now, I still feel it is difficult to describe, I don't know how to talk about it. Actually, I do want to talk about it in detail, but I always feel sad. I am still struggling to get over the trauma. But I know I should speak out, even if just in this simple way."

Wen said he feels terribly ashamed about his confession and has struggled to be accepted back into the community of Chinese human rights defenders. "The way they chose [what I had to say] and edited [the confession recording] made me incredibly upset. I was so damn angry. Worse, it ruined my reputation among many people. Some thought I had sold out friends and partners. Ever since, my reputation has taken a big hit, and some pretty mean things have [been said about me]."

Bao Longjun said after he was released and found out that the short clip he had made had been put on national television (he thought it was just for the Yunnan PSB) he felt cheated, but he did it for his son and so he was not ashamed. "I think people understand how parents care about their children. And I myself know that I never [knowingly] recorded anything for television. I was tricked."

But a local Chinese grassroots activist, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that after he was forced to give a denounce confession and later released, he has had to abandon his rights defence work because of the way people now view him.

Chinese independent journalist Zhao Sile (赵思乐) said that the denounce confessions, in particular, can cause rifts in the community. "Some people will think that this person [the one made to confess] should not be trusted anymore. He betrayed our work. And betrayed other people. And others argue that they are forced and they are still our friend and they are still our hero. And the two sides argue, and the two sides will not be comfortable with each other." She admitted that she herself may find it difficult to trust them. "I have sympathy, but it's also very hard to me to work with them again because I know that when they are interrogated or caught they may say my name."

Chinese human rights lawyer Lin Qilei (蔺其磊) urged for forgiveness and understanding. "First, we must continue to trust them, affirm their contribution to democratic

"I have sympathy, but it's also very hard for me to work with them again because I know that when they are interrogated or caught they may say my name."

Zhao Sile

SCRIPTED AND STAGED

constitutionalism, and praise their dedication. Second, we must absolutely not accept their 'confession,' or blame them, at least we should remember: in the absence of any legal procedural guarantees, the so-called 'confession' is [not their own words.] If we make a moral judgment on the 'confessor' and accept the 'confession,' then we have instead fallen into the CCP's plan."

Peter Dahlin agreed and said that this kind of distrust is exactly what the CCP wants. "It means the government has really succeeded in a way. A lack of knowledge about how these confessions are forced means people often have a naïve idea that everyone is either good (they refuse to make a confession) or bad (they make a confession). But all these people have put their own safety at risk to help others in their line of work, so quite often they're not confessing just to save themselves. From the people who I know who have confessed, it's not threats against them that made them give in and make a confession, it's when their loved ones are threatened that they do."

Those who made videoed confessions that were not aired may also feel under pressure because there is always a risk that they could be aired at a later date. After Lam Wing-kee skipped bail and gave his press conference in Hong Kong, exposing the booksellers' confessions as coerced and staged, China released old confession footage of him on CCTV to try to discredit him. Wen, Guo, and Chen Taihe have all made confession tapes that have not yet been broadcast and could potentially be used against them.

The televised confessions are also painful for the family to watch. Angela Gui, the daughter of Swedish bookseller Gui Minhai, said she couldn't bear to watch it when she saw the news that her father had appeared on television in January 2016. "I didn't actually watch it until much later. Because obviously I found out quite soon after it aired. My reaction was: I think there's not going to be much sleep for me. This is something that I'm going to have to deal with... So I just made it easier for myself and I read a transcript.... to be honest I don't really have any words to describe [how it felt]... It's the kind of thing nobody should ever have to experience so there shouldn't be words for it."



CREDIT: MELTAN. ARTIST IMPRESSION OF POLICE MAKING A FORCED TELEVISED CONFESSION WITH SUPERVISION AND DIRECTION.

Wen, a human rights defender, was kept in solitary confinement and threatened for weeks before he eventually gave a televised confession. He only found out it had been put on television after his release.

His real name and other identifying details have been obscured for his safety. Wen still lives in China.

I was never told that the recording would be televised. The security agents lied. Earlier, they had placed me in a secret prison under Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location. Now, weeks after being put into solitary confinement, they wanted me to agree to record a video, to show their “bosses.” The point they made to me, repeatedly, was that a video would show that I was being cooperative, and that I had accepted that I had been wrong.

Mr. Bao, the friendlier of the two agents who handled my case, came into my cell one afternoon and sat down for a talk. He wanted to help me, to find a proper resolution for my situation. He needed my help to do that. He had to show his bosses that I was cooperating, and that he was right—that I should be released in some way, and not prosecuted. My friends and partners had made videos, Mr. Bao said. He showed me a transcript of what they had said, and although he did not give me enough time to read much of it, it was nonetheless clear: record the video, and you might get released. No video, no release.

After that nothing much happened. They had largely stopped the draining all night-long interrogations, and I sat trying to kill time in my cell, staring into the suicide-proofed padded walls for maybe three or four days before the actual recording happened. I should have known something was up because before the big production, Mr. Bao, with Mr. Yin, who always tried to be mean and threatening, and Mr. Wang, their superior, all came into my cell together with a group of guards. I was told I could shower, even wash my hair, and then put on the clothes I had worn when they detained me. Later, I was blind-folded and taken down into the basement car park. I have very little recollection of how long we drove, but it felt like a long time, but I also remember being stuck in traffic. By the time my blindfold was removed I was inside a large hotel suite.

“they would not only decide what I was to say, but how I said it: the speed of my voice, the exact wording, the expression on my face.”

They seated me on a chair by one of the walls. The curtains were all closed, and the door to the other room inside was closed. People, including the three investigators, entered and returned from behind that closed door. I assumed senior officers must be sitting there giving directions. A television camera on a large tripod was set up, and besides the cameraman, other police security agents were walking around. The hotel was obviously a very expensive one, with that gaudy style officials and businessmen like. It looked bad, but also expensive.

It became clear that this was something else altogether, that this was to be yet another forced confession television show. In the end, I thought my release was more important, as they didn’t insist on me calling anyone a criminal and I would be largely just repeating what others had said in their videos, as far as I knew. One thing was made clear though, there was no room for bargaining. I was to say exactly, word for word, what they decided. There was no debate.

Both interrogators who entered the room from the back were holding a piece of paper. I later realized this was the paper with my questions and answers, prepared for me to read into the camera. I had to learn them by heart. Later on, as we took breaks between takes they would add things or change what I was supposed to say. Once we actually started, they would not only decide what I was to say, but how I said it: the speed of my voice, the exact wording, the expression on my face.

The cameraman finished setting up the extra lighting, and we got going. Mr. Bao read out the questions first. All of it was choreographed, and the whole thing went on perhaps

seven hours, with so many retakes I can't remember for sure. Other agents or officers would fill up the room, but of course, you never saw them on screen. I had to say said everything just right, every word they had chosen.

It would be the middle of the evening by the time we returned to the prison, and as before the whole trip, from the hotel room to the cell, I was blindfolded.

It would take several more days of killing time inside the cell before Mr. Bao came back. They wanted to make another video. It was already prepared. This time the two guards in the cell led me across the small corridor into a larger room. My cell, the interrogation room, and this larger room, was my world when I was inside.

This time it was just the three interrogators. Mr. Bao lead the session, reading the questions for me. One of the others would hold a small handheld camera and record me. A paper, with questions and answers, were simply placed in front of me. A very different experience from the expensive production before.

I never did understand why they wanted the second one. It was never used. Most of the questions were exactly the same. The only difference was they wanted me to admit being part of a human rights network. But in the end, they never used the recording.

It would be two or three days after my release that I saw the CCTV piece. I could read online about it, and people were talking about it on WeChat. Funnily, I didn't manage to find the actual video at first, only print reports, and had to use a VPN to circumvent China's firewall.

The way they chose [what I had to say] and edited [the confession recording] made me incredibly upset. I was so damn angry. Worse, it ruined my reputation among many people. Some people thought I had sold out friends and partners. Ever since my reputation has taken a big hit, and some pretty mean things have been said by people who have no idea what they are talking about, or the fact that [it was faked and edited]. If you read what I said, you realise that I didn't really say anything about [those people] but that's the impression people get watching the whole shit piece anyway.

THE COLLABORATORS

“These televised confessions intimidate public intellectuals, they make everyone feel insecure, censor themselves, never dare to say anything or do anything against the Party. It's a white horror.”

Li, human rights defender

Chinese media as a tool of the CCP

Chinese state media has always played an important propaganda role for the CCP, however, under the current CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping, their relationship has grown even closer. In early 2016, Mr. Xi toured the head offices of major media, including state broadcaster CCTV, where he underscored its primary role as the Party's mouthpiece.⁵² “They must love the party, protect the party, and closely align themselves with the party leadership in thought, politics and action,” Mr. Xi told news workers. For his visit, CCTV headquarters hung a banner proclaiming: “CCTV's family name is the Party.” Chinese state media, including CCTV and all its channels, unquestionably serve as CCP mouthpieces and the televised confessions must be viewed from that perspective.

In terms of organization, the CCP directly controls the country's media through its Central Publicity (formerly Propaganda) Department, a party organ. Several ostensibly state bodies, namely the State Council Information Office (SCIO) and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) are also in charge of the news media. It was announced in March 2018, that SAPPRFT will be disbanded.

But, the CCP has always been the one in control, First, SAPPRFT was overseen by the Central Publicity Department. Secondly, despite the “State Council” in its name, the SCIO is a party organ; its other name is the CCP Central Office of Foreign Propaganda. Apart from its general overseas propaganda duties in telling “China's story to the world,” this Office is “also in charge of ‘clarifying and refuting’ any stories that are forbidden from being covered in China but which have been reported on in foreign media.”⁵³ **A task that is all too obviously aligned with the apparent purpose of the deny confessions in this report.**

In March 2018, China announced a major overhaul of its media controls and state broadcast media. SAPPRFT's work will be absorbed under the Central Publicity Department while CCTV, China Radio International and China National Radio will be merged into one giant media company to be called the Voice of China.⁵⁴ As a one-party state, China does not allow independent reporting. Irrespective of who owns the media—the Party, the state, or a partly or wholly private company—it is the Party that ultimately controls what can be broadcast or published.

Suspicions have also been cast on Chinese state media posted overseas for spying for the CCP. The *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2017 Annual Report* accuses staff of Chinese state-run media based in the US of covert intelligence gathering and thus recommends that all staff be included under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).⁵⁵ Since Chinese state media produce coverage that is controlled by a foreign

government there is mounting pressure to force CCTV/CGTN and other Chinese state media operating in the US to register as a foreign agent.

The collaborating media

By the time this report went to print, at least five media companies, all based in China (the mainland and Hong Kong)⁵⁶ had collaborated with China's security agencies to broadcast one or more televised confessions for the **45 confession videos** in this study. State-owned CCTV aired the majority of the confession broadcasts on multiple nationwide channels including CCTV1, CCTV4, CCTV9 and CCTV13 and regional channels (Wenzhou TV, Xinjiang TV). In 2016, the medium of broadcast extended to include two Hong Kong-based media companies, Phoenix TV and *Oriental Daily* and mainland state-funded online newspaper, *The Paper*. In 2017, the Hong Kong-based, but mainland China-owned, *South China Morning Post*, joined the list.

CCTV (中央电视台)

<http://tv.cctv.com/>

CCTV or China Central Television is China's main state broadcaster and the only national broadcaster. Despite being state-owned, it earns billions of dollars every year from pay TV and advertising revenue as well as receiving government subsidies. In 2015, it took in over US\$4 billion in revenue, ranking 19th globally.⁵⁷ It has dozens of channels; the main news channels are CCTV1 (domestic), CCTV4 (global, Chinese), CGTN (global, English, formerly CCTV9) and CCTV13 (domestic).

CCTV has been the main medium for the televised confessions—over 90% were broadcast on one or more of its national and/or regional channels. It also rebroadcast the confessions filmed by non-state media companies.



Dong Qian (董倩) is a CCTV journalist and news anchor. She was named by Wu Gan and by an anonymous interviewee for this report as the journalist involved in their forced televised confession. (In Mr Wu's case, he refused to cooperate).

Ms. Dong, born 1971 and a history graduate of Beijing University, got her first job with CCTV as an editor for their *Focus Report* (焦点访谈). Subsequently she worked as a reporter and host for a number of other CCTV programs including *Oriental Horizon* (东方时空), *News Probe* (新闻调查), *CCTV Forum* (央视论坛) and *News 1+1* (新闻1+1). These programs frequently aired confessions.

IMAGE CREDIT: www.gov.cn

Phoenix TV (凤凰)

<http://www.ifeng.com/>

Phoenix TV is a Hong Kong-based station that broadcasts globally in Chinese. In 2003, it became one of the few non-state owned companies to be allowed to broadcast inside China. It is often described as CCP-affiliated and its programs, “patriotic” and “pro-China.”⁵⁸ The founder and current CEO is Liu Changle, a former journalist turned businessman from mainland China. According to its website, it has six channels and an audience of more than 360 million viewers. Its shares have been listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange since 2000.

Phoenix TV broadcast two televised confessions: the February 2016 Hong Kong booksellers confession (with Gui Minhai as the main confessor) and Wang Yu’s August 2016 confession.

Oriental Daily (东方日报)

<http://orientaldaily.on.cc/>

The *Oriental Daily News*, a Chinese-language newspaper, was founded in 1969 in Hong Kong. It is considered largely pro-Beijing, focuses on more sensationalist, entertainment news,⁵⁹ and is popular among older readers. The paper is owned by Oriental Press Group Ltd., an investment company whose main business is newspapers in Hong Kong and Australia. The CEO is Mr. Shun-chuen Lam.

The Oriental Daily broadcast three confessions: the February 2016 Hong Kong booksellers confession (with Gui Minhai as the main confessor), Wang Yu’s August 2016 confession and Gui Minhai’s February 2018 staged media appearance.

The Paper (澎湃)

www.thepaper.cn/

The Paper is a news portal backed by the Shanghai Media Group and it also receives state funding. Aimed at the post 90’s generation, it was launched in 2014. Commentators say while much of the reporting is just the usual party propaganda, there is a degree of investigative journalism on less sensitive topics but still of public interest.⁶⁰ In 2016, it launched an English-language news site called *Sixth Tone*.

The Paper posted one televised confession from this study (Wang Yu in August 2016). In January 2018 it also posted a doctored video of rights lawyer Yu Wensheng (余文生) as he was arrested taking his son to school.⁶¹

South China Morning Post

<http://www.scmp.com/frontpage/international>

The *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) is an English-language newspaper based in Hong Kong. It was founded in 1903, when Hong Kong was under British rule. At the end of 2015, mainland e-commerce giant Alibaba bought the SCMP Group, including the *South China Morning Post*. Since the takeover, the newspaper has come under increasing criticism for peddling CCP propaganda.⁶² As one critic notes: "Control of the SCMP gives Beijing an arm's-length platform for spinning China's version of world events to the rest of the English-speaking world outside Hong Kong."⁶³ There is no doubt that the SCMP has progressed from merely playing down criticisms of China and publishing CCP propaganda in line with Alibaba's stated aim of "improving China's image," to collaborating with the Chinese state and police.

The SCMP broadcast Gui Minhai's 9 February 2018 confession on their website, posting an incomplete transcript. It also came under fire in 2016 for printing an interview with Zhao Wei (赵威), a legal assistant who had been caught up in the 709 Crackdown and had spent a year in secret detention.⁶⁴

The first English-language media collaborator

It is worthwhile taking a closer look at the SCMP, as it is the first English-language, non-state media that collaborated with the Chinese police to circulate a televised confession. Because of its long-standing reputation in the region—as recently as 2016 it topped a list of most trusted media in Hong Kong (although its credibility was also on the decline)⁶⁵—its 2018 broadcast of Mr. Gui's confession should raise serious alarm bells over its impartiality.



Tammy Tam (谭卫儿), born in Guangdong province⁶⁶ spent 20 years as a newspaper and TV journalist in Hong Kong, before she became deputy editor of the paper under Wang Xiangwei (see below) in January 2012.⁶⁷ Just after the Alibaba takeover, in January 2016, she took over as editor-in-chief.⁶⁸ In this top position, Ms. Tam is directly responsible for the newspaper's collaboration with Chinese police in sending reporter Phila Siu to cover Swedish bookseller Gui Minhai's

third confession in February and a controversial phone interview with rights activist Zhao Wei in July 2016, which carried no byline.

IMAGE CREDIT: www.SCMP.com



Wang Xiangwei (王向偉), was editor-in-chief of the paper between 2012 and 2015. Previously, he worked for China Daily and the BBC Chinese service before joining the SCMP in 1996 as a business reporter.⁶⁹ As editor-in-chief, Mr. Wang came under criticism for censoring coverage of Chinese human rights issues.⁷⁰ Wang was once a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.⁷¹ After Tammy Tan took over as editor-in-chief, he

stayed on at the paper as editorial advisor based in Beijing.

IMAGE CREDIT: www.SCMP.com

The globalisation of China's media

The audience for these televised confessions is not confined to mainland China: the majority of the televised confessions were also broadcast on CCTV's two global channels—CCTV9, now rebranded as CGTN, and CCTV4. CGTN has a 24-hour English language news channel, also broadcasts in Spanish, French, Arabic and Russian, and has broadcast centres in Washington DC and Nairobi in Kenya and is planning to open a new centre in London.⁷² CCTV4, its Chinese -language overseas network has three broadcast zones: Asia, Europe and America. Most confessions were broadcast on CCTV4, and several *only* on CCTV4.

China's state media also aggressively uses social media tools that are banned at home.⁷³ CGTN (<https://www.cgtn.com/>) curates accounts on Facebook (with more than 46 million followers), Twitter (more than six million followers), and YouTube (more than 285,000 subscribers). Its Chinese-language media has also opened dozens of these social media channels with followers and subscribers in the hundreds of thousands to up to 3 million.

Another long-used strategy of Chinese state media for securing an overseas audience is in forging partnerships with western media. This ranges from using paid inserts (*China Daily* places its propaganda sheet *China Watch* in the *Washington Post*, the UK's *The Telegraph*, *Le Figaro* in France, and Australia's Fairfax Media) to joint television productions such as the three-part *China: Time of Xi* made by Discovery Asia, but which "received help with research and access from China Intercontinental Communication Centre, a company belonging to the Communist Party Propaganda Department, whose role isn't listed in the credits."⁷⁴

The recent reform of the state broadcaster into a giant media TV and radio arm, the Voice of China, a state body that will be under direct CCP control, will mean an even more concerted push behind the CCP's overseas agenda through its packaged and propagandised media.

wang yu (part 2)



CREDIT: MELTAN. ARTIST IMPRESSION OF WANG YU BEING BLACK-HOODED AND LED AWAY BY POLICE FOR A RECORDING.

Wang Yu is one of China's most respected human rights lawyers. Originally a commercial lawyer, she dedicated herself to rights defence work in 2011 after her own experiences with police abuse and wrongful imprisonment. She and her husband, Bao Longjun, were caught up in the 709 Crackdown and kept in RSDL and detention for more than a year. She was awarded the American Bar Association International Human Rights Award while she was in state custody.

This is the second part of Ms. Wang's written testimony.

It is difficult to explain, why I went on television, what kind of mental process I had gone through. And until now, I still feel it is difficult to describe, I don't know how to talk about it. **Actually, I do want to talk about it in detail, but I always feel sad. I am still struggling to get over the trauma. But I know I should speak out, even if just in this simple way.**

It was about April 2016 and I had already been transferred to the Tianjin First Detention Centre. I had just finished my breast surgery at that time and the guards and interrogators were taking quite good care of me. My interrogator said if I cooperated then my case would be "dealt with leniently." He meant I could be released soon. They also kept reminding me that my dream of sending my son overseas to study could happen only once I had been released from the detention centre.

How, then, did they want me to cooperate? They said all the 709 Crackdown people need to demonstrate a good attitude before they would be dealt with leniently. They said a PSB boss would come to the detention centre in a few days and they wanted me to say to him that: "I understand my mistake, I was tricked, and I was used. I denounce those overseas anti-China forces and I am grateful for how the PSB have helped and educated me." After that, they stopped taking me to the interrogation room and moved me to a staff office where they fixed up space for me to eat and memorise the material my interrogator gave me.

Around about the end of April, the interrogator told me the boss was coming today and that we should make the video. He promised me the video would only be shown to that boss, and it would definitely not be shown to the public. He told me not to worry and just follow the script they had given to me. If I couldn't memorise it all, then we could just re-record it. They also told me that everyone who was caught up in the 709 Crackdown had already make such a video. I kept asking them to confirm that it wouldn't be shown in public and they promised that it would not. Despite their assurances, I was still very unhappy about having to do the video.

In the afternoon, I was taken to the office again. A few minutes later, a man came in; he was in plainclothes and about 50 years old. A young man in his 20s followed with a camera. They both said something similar to me; something about how they would find a way out for me. I have suffered a lot of memory loss in the past few years so even if I try to remember exactly what happened, I can't. But I do remember asking him who would see the video and he repeatedly said that it was only for their boss and not for television.

The young man finished setting up the camera, then the older one started asking questions. I don't remember the exact questions, but it was basically the same as my interrogator had told me to study. I didn't answer very well, because my memory was bad and also I didn't want to make the video. I really messed up some of the questions and they had to ask me again and again. After three or four hours, they eventually left.

Some 20 days later, I heard that the so-called PSB boss had said that last video was not good enough and that we had to record it again. So, we recorded it again, but two days later, my interrogator said it still wasn't acceptable. **The next time they came with a camera and a computer, with the script typed into the computer in a huge font size. They wanted me to read it from the screen and look into the camera.** We recorded it like this many times and finally they left. But another two days later they came back and said it still wasn't good enough, so we did it all again. But that didn't pass either.

It was about the beginning of June, one day before the Dragon Boat festival, when my interrogator told me that another boss was coming and wanted to talk to me. If I behaved

well I could get out of the detention centre. Not long after, two men in their 50s or 60s in plainclothes, came in. They surprised me by shaking my hand when they first arrived. Later, I learned they were the vice-director and division chief of Tianjin PSB. They talked briefly about my health and my situation and then asked me to give a self-evaluation. I said: "Of course, I think that I am a good person and also a good lawyer. I believe in behaving with kindness and I am professional in my work and have always won my clients' approval."

After that they often took me to their office to talk with them. They kept trying to persuade me to do an interview on television, but I kept saying no.

In the beginning of July, my interrogator talked to me alone. He said, **"Think carefully. If you don't agree to go on television how will you be able to get out? How will your husband Bao Longjun be able to get out? How will your son ever be able to study abroad?"**

I thought hard about it for a few nights. I thought, neither me nor my husband can communicate with anyone from outside. Who knows when it will all end. And my poor son was home without us. We didn't know how he was doing. Although, my interrogator told me that he had been released and was living in Ulanhot, he might be under surveillance, he didn't have his parents with him. What kind of future would he have?

I thought the two so-called "bosses" who had been talking with me looked like they would keep their word. After speaking with them for many days, I trusted them, and the people around me treated me much better. Much better than when I was in RSDL, where they were very cruel to me.

So, I decided to accept. I just wanted to see my son so much. I thought, if I couldn't get out my son would never be able to study overseas. I might get out many years later, but by then what would have happened to my son? If he was harmed now, the trauma would stay with him his whole life. I needed to be with him during this stage of his life. I decided that I would do my best to help my son go to a free country and study. He would no longer live like a slave, suffering in this country. He has to leave, he must leave, I thought. That was the most urgent thing. **So I had to do it, even if it meant doing something awful.**

I also considered the possibility that they might break their promise—and if they did I vowed to fight. So, I said yes to their request to go on television, but only if they released me first. **I started practicing the script they prepared for me and we rehearsed it many times, almost every day before I left the detention centre.**

On 22 July 2016, they went through the formality of my "release on bail." They took me from the Tianjin First Detention Centre to the Tianjin Police Training Base under Tianjin Panshan Mountain. I stayed there for about 10 days.

They transferred me to Tianjin Heping Hotel and for the next two days I was still under their control. I did the interview in a western-style building near the Heping Hotel a few days later. That afternoon, about 4 or 5pm I was reunited with my son. He hugged me and cried for a long time. I also quietly shed tears.

The next day, my son and I met his father Bao Longjun who had also just been released on bail.

After my release I became very depressed. We were kept under house arrest in Ulanhot. My son and his father often made fun of me because of what I had said on that television interview and I felt very hurt and under a lot of pressure. One time, when I couldn't stand it anymore, I asked my son, "Would you rather I suffered and went on television so I

could be with you, or would you prefer that I didn't go on television but then stayed in prison?" My son said emphatically: "I want my mum with me!"

Hearing my son say this, I believe that everything I suffered was worth it. This was the only way I could be reunited with my son, so I had to do it.

When I got back home, I gradually began to understand what kind of pain my son had been through over the past year. Such cruelty caused my son to suffer from severe depression and that made me even more determined to settle my son overseas so that he could heal both mentally and physically.

So, this is my story. I don't expect everyone to understand. I just want to say that my son is everything to me. Perhaps, I had no other choice.

THE LAW

“Outside of a court, no one has the right to decide whether someone is guilty of a crime. The police aren’t qualified to say someone is guilty. Prosecutors aren’t qualified to declare someone guilty. News media are even less qualified to determine guilt.”

Zhang Liyong, judge

China’s televised confessions trample on basic human rights protections and deprive the suspect of due process; infringing on the right to a fair trial, the presumption of innocence, the right to remain silent, and the right not to self-incriminate. Forced confessions violate domestic regulations and a number of human rights under international law. Their use has attracted fierce criticism locally and internationally from legal professionals. Both the security agencies involved and the collaborating media (including Hong Kong-based media) are clearly complicit in these rights violations, and arguably any international media that rebroadcasts forced confessions share a degree of culpability. Forced televised confessions require an urgent global response because not only are they a violation of international human rights law, several of the victims have been overseas nationals and at least three were kidnapped by the Chinese state outside its borders.⁷⁵

Chinese law

The televised confessions violate the principle of presumption of innocence under Chinese law. In 1996, China revised its Criminal Procedure Law (CPL) and adjusted the wording “to indicate a new acceptance of the presumption.”⁷⁶ Article 12 of the CPL rules that: “No person shall be found guilty without being judged as such by a People’s Court according to law.”⁷⁷ Prior to 1996, anyone detained could be called a “criminal;” after the 1996 revision that was changed to “suspect” before trial, “defendant” during trial.

Despite the political sensitivity of the issue, several legal professionals inside China have spoken out and publicly criticized the use of televised confessions. In March 2016, Zhu Zhengfu, deputy chairman of the All-China Lawyers Association told Chinese media: “A confession made on television does not equate to a legitimate confession or carry any indication he or she is guilty. If the confession was staged, it does not help protect the rights of the suspect or the justice system.”⁷⁸ Mr. Zhu suggested that they were an affront to human dignity and warned that the practice was a “trial by media,” making it difficult for courts to make a fair judgment.

A senior Chinese judge, Zhang Liyong, told western media in the same month that televised confessions are unlawful.⁷⁹ “Outside of a court, no one has the right to decide whether someone is guilty of a crime. The police aren’t qualified to say someone is guilty. Prosecutors aren’t qualified to declare someone guilty. News media are even less qualified to determine guilt.”

Lawyer You Luchen (尤陆沉)⁸⁰ in an interview he gave to Safeguard Defenders for this report, argued the televised confessions “violate the spirit of the rule of law, violate human

rights, and go against the crucial and fundamental principle in criminal law [to protect] against 'self-incrimination.'" Mr. You added that even though Chinese law has no provisions guaranteeing a suspect's right to silence, since there are legal protections against self-incrimination then naturally that should mean the right to silence is protected. "Any attempt before trial to require a person to make a confession or to confess on television, violates this principle."

Chinese rights lawyer and activist Teng Biao (滕彪), who now lives in the US in exile, said China's forced televised confessions violate the presumption of innocence that is protected under the CPL. "But in this new age of totalitarianism, the [Chinese] media are first and foremost a propaganda tool of the Party." He views the practice of televised confessions as evolving out of the CCP's practice of "self-criticism," the public struggle sessions during the Cultural Revolution and public trials during crackdowns. "The CCP has always used the law as a tool to mobilize and educate the masses."

Chinese rights lawyer, Li Fanping (李方平), who is still based in China, also links them with the unlawful practices of Mao-era China. "Televised confessions are unacceptable, they are even more despicable than the shame parade, that was once common in China. They not only trample on human dignity, but also violate the fundamental principles of criminal procedure."

"Outrageous forms of torture such as beatings, humiliation and forced medication are used to get them to denounce themselves"

Lawyer Lin Qilei

Legal scholars share his view that the televised confessions are a return to the old China. "The street parades of yesterday have become the television parades of today," Chinese University of Political Science and Law professor He Bing wrote in 2013. "The political movement has overtaken the law."⁸¹

Veteran scholar on China's legal environment, Jerome A. Cohen argues there is no doubt the televised confessions are coerced. In a comment on lawyer Wang Yu's August 2016 televised confession, Mr. Cohen wrote: "To say that her statement was 'probably' the product of coercion is silly since she has been held in an immensely coercive environment for over a year. These 'confessions' are reminiscent of the 'brainwashing' era of the 1950s for which the new China became infamous."⁸²

As the interviews and testimonies in this research have shown, China's televised confessions are routinely associated with a host of other extra-legal actions and rights violations perpetrated by the security forces—including kidnapping, enforced disappearances, routine denial of access to lawyer and family visits, forced confessions and torture.

Human rights lawyer Lin Qilei (蔺其磊) said the televised confessions are without a doubt illegal and are used as a tool to suppress rights activists. "The CCP has completely disregarded the law. Making detainees (mainly political dissidents) admit their 'crimes' was the main means of suppression during the 709 Crackdown and afterwards. Outrageous forms of torture such as beatings, humiliation and forced medication are used to get them to denounce themselves."

International law

These televised confessions violate a number of international laws and standards. First, they violate the right to a **fair trial**. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 11, holds

that “everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.”⁸³ So fundamental is the right to a fair trial that it appears in countless international treaties, state practices, and jurisprudence. It is part of customary international law and binding upon states regardless of treaty ratification.

More than the presumption of innocence, international fair trial standards are clear that court proceedings must be independent, impartial, and established by law. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights furthermore emphasises that no one shall be “compelled to testify against himself or to confess guilt.”⁸⁴

The fact that victims of forced confessions have routinely been denied access to a lawyer of their choice further infringes on the right to a fair trial. The right of the detained person “to be visited by and to consult and communicate, without delay or censorship and in full confidentiality, with his legal counsel may not be suspended or restricted,”⁸⁵ except under limited circumstances. However, international standards hold that communication “with the outside world, and in particular his family or counsel, shall not be denied for **more than a matter of days.**”⁸⁶

The United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) holds that the right to a fair trial “is a key element of human rights protection and serves as a procedural means to safeguard the rule of law.”⁸⁷ Forced confessions, therefore, are not only a violation of this fundamental human rights protection, but also a direct assault on the rule of law itself.

Forced confessions often take place following **arbitrary and lengthy pre-trial detention**. Under international law, the right to liberty and security of a person, such as the freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention, is universal. The UNHRC holds that arbitrariness is to be interpreted based on “appropriateness, injustice, lack of predictability and due process of law.” International standards are clear that anyone deprived of their liberty is entitled to know and challenge the reason and lawfulness of their detention. This is a fundamental international right known as *habeas corpus*. Forced confessions of human rights defenders occur within the context of arbitrary detention, which is often lengthy, itself a violation under international law. Everyone is entitled “to a trial within a reasonable time or to release.” Lengthy pre-trial detention should never be the rule.

A criminal justice system reliant on confessions raises the risk of **torture**, with victims of enforced disappearance and secret detention especially at risk. Torture is so repugnant a violation of human rights, there are no circumstances that excuse the practice and under specific conditions it may rise to the level of a crime against humanity. Many televised confessions are the result of extreme physical or emotional coercion and thus they qualify as being obtained through torture. This is a direct violation not only of the fundamental prohibition on the use of torture enshrined in international law but also Article 15 of the Convention on Torture, which requires states to “ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made.”⁸⁸ In other words, under no circumstances, through legal proceedings or media broadcast, are statements, such as confessions, to be used for any purpose, other than as evidence in a trial **against the perpetrator of torture.**

China’s illegal practice of televised confessions has impacted foreign citizens and **involved the extra-legal detention of individuals outside of its own borders.**

At least 12 individuals—two Swedish, one British, one US, three Hongkongers and five Taiwanese—were made to appear in one or more televised confessions in China. Furthermore, three of the victims, Swedish citizen Gui Minhai, and two Chinese citizens, Jiang Yefei and Dong Guangping, were snatched from outside China’s borders. Mr. Gui was kidnapped from his holiday home in Thailand,⁸⁹ while Thai police handed Mr. Jiang and Mr. Dong over to Chinese security agents even though both had been recognized as refugees by the UN Refugee Agency and were awaiting resettlement.⁹⁰

Li, a human rights defender, was detained and released around a year later, without charge. He was pressured repeatedly to confess on camera but resisted. His name and other identifying details have been concealed for his safety. Li still lives in China.

Police officers (I had two section chiefs, and two district chiefs interrogate me) used a DV camera and asked me to confess and said they will give it to their leader. If my attitude is good, they will release me. Everything depends on whether my attitude is good or not... I know that these videos can be used for other purposes without our consent. I believe that it's the same with other detainees: the police officers trick you into trusting them to take a recording; no television reporter comes to make the interview. The police then send the tapes on to the television station to edit and then broadcast.

They tricked me two or three times, right at the beginning when they first detained me. After that, I didn't let them. I refused and asked the section chief who was interrogating me to ensure that it wouldn't be used for anything else. The section chief thought for a moment and said he could only guarantee that that while it was in his hands it wouldn't be used for anything else.

[But] they kept trying. They filmed the entirety from searching my home to taking me to the train, and during the whole train journey to Beijing to ensure that as soon as I made a confession, they could use it in a public broadcast.

The consequences of refusing of course is to keep being detained. Of course, there are those who were tricked into confessing on video who were not freed immediately—after you've made a self-confession, what other reasons is there for the police to keep you locked up and punish you for your crime? When the police interrogated me, I would just reply with a question. This kind of "dodgy" interrogation video of course couldn't be put on television.

The Party wants the detainee to incriminate themselves, to humiliate the detainee and to make them look morally bad in front of the Chinese people, so they stop caring about the people who are detained. The detainees will lose their only source of moral support, and ultimately, they can only end up being destroyed by the Party.

These TV confessions intimidate public intellectuals, they make everyone feel insecure, censor themselves, to never dare to say anything or do anything against the Party. **It's a white horror.**

While I was detained, I underwent a lot of 'brainwashing'-style of interrogations and I was interrogated more than 70 times. They would take it in turns to interrogate me, mainly this took the form of mental torture and interrogating me when I was exhausted; they threatened that if I did not cooperate with them, they would sentence me to jail time, I'd lose my job, my family would leave me, and I'd lose my reputation for the rest of my life. **I was only 39 years old, my hair turned white with the enormous pressure and torture of it all.**

They called me in for interrogations in the middle of the night, but I fought back against the questioning. I demanded that they protect my right to have some sleep. They had eyes and ears in my cell [an informer], to trick me to give out information. I saw this informer after we had been released and he told me. They also tried to get others to commit perjury and use them as evidence of my guilt.

CONCLUSION

There should be no doubt after reading this report that China's televised confessions are gross violations of both domestic law on the right to a fair trial and basic international human rights protections. There should also be no doubt that they are staged theatre, written and directed by the police with the cooperation of the media. From our analysis of what suspects are forced or manipulated to say, and when they say it, there is also little doubt that China is using these televised confessions as a propaganda weapon for both domestic consumption and as a foreign policy tool for an overseas audience.

There is little to distinguish them from the repugnant practices of Mao-era public struggle sessions or Stalin's infamous show trials. Interviews for this report revealed how the confessions are extracted through torture, beatings, threats and fear. The fact that media collaborate does not just reflect a shocking lack of journalistic ethics but direct culpability with this outrageous abuse of human rights of both Chinese citizens and foreign nationals. Furthermore, China's use of forced televised confessions warrants urgent global attention as Beijing steps up its aggressive push to globalize its state media—including on social media channels banned at home—to “tell the China story”.

Scripted and Staged: Behind the scenes of China's TV confessions reveals these confessions for what they really are: systematic and widespread abuses of human rights to serve the political interests of the CCP. Our recommendations are:

- **The People's Republic of China:** should immediately halt the use of televised confessions, provide all detainees with the legal protections already enshrined in domestic law and review the existing legal framework to prevent further violations.
- **Overseas governments:** should unequivocally stress to the People's Republic of China:
 - the need for stronger protections in law and in enforcement for due process;
 - that it must immediately cease broadcasting televised confessions of detainees;
 - that there will be consequences for ongoing violations of fundamental rights and freedoms.
- **International media** has an obligation to ethically and responsibly report on China's televised confessions, by exercising caution and adding crucial background that explains how the practice violates both Chinese law and international human rights protections; that threats and torture are routinely used as coercion; that they are often scripted and staged by the police; and that they are very likely a vehicle of Party propaganda.
- **Immediate action should be taken against Chinese media responsible for the broadcast of televised confessions.** This report identifies CCTV and its channels – CCTV1, CCTV4, CGTN (formerly known as CCTV9) and CCTV13 as the main vehicles for China's televised confessions. Recommended actions are:

- Utilize the Foreign Agents Registration Act (in the US) and equivalent in other countries, to force CCTV and responsible media to register as a foreign agent.
- Utilize existing tools to sanction (travel bans and asset freezes) on key CCTV executives. This would follow similar action taken on Iran's Press TV in 2013 by the EU after its broadcasts of forced televised confessions.
- Introduce Magnitsky-style legislation in jurisdictions without a Magnitsky Act, and use that to pursue further action on all CCP-owned or controlled media, including CCTV.

Appendix I: METHODOLOGY

This report was put together by staff at [Safeguard Defenders](#) and focused on two key approaches: interviews with victims of China’s practice of forced televised confessions and an analysis of the confession broadcasts, including details of individual cases. Data from these two approaches were used to investigate what goes on behind the scenes: how the Chinese authorities coerce detainees to participate in televised confessions and to find clues from the broadcasts themselves to indicate their political purpose. This report also examines how the televised confessions can be judged in terms of domestic laws and international human rights norms.

The interviews

We conducted semi-structured interviews and solicited written testimony from **12** people, most had appeared on television to give a “confession;” two had recorded a confession that was not broadcast; one had been pressured to make a recorded confession but had resisted; and, one family member of a victim. In addition, we drew upon research collected by Safeguard Defenders from previous interviews with victims of Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location (RSDL) that were published in the book, *The People’s Republic of the Disappeared*.⁹¹ In addition to victims, we also interviewed Chinese legal scholars for their comments on the legality of the confessions.

We have concealed the identities (including the gender)⁹² of many those who talked with us and who still live in China because of a fear of reprisals from the state. Without their help and their courage in speaking out this report would not have been possible. For a list of names and pseudonyms of those whose offered testimony or agreed to be interviewed please see the Introduction.

The interviews and written testimonies were collected between April 2017 and March 2018. The majority of these were obtained by Safeguard Defenders;⁹³ several were taken from a graduate thesis;⁹⁴ or from testimony available online (Lam Wing-kee and Xie Yang).

Although every effort was made to contact as many victims as possible, because of the extreme sensitivity of this issue many were too afraid to speak; many others also are inaccessible because they are behind bars (Zhou Shifeng), executed (Zhang Lidong), or live under heavy surveillance or non-release release conditions.⁹⁵

The confession broadcasts

A chronological database of the televised confessions was made by searching news reports in English (google.com) and simplified Chinese (baidu.cn). The broadcasts were then located on the websites of the broadcaster (CCTV, regional Chinese TV), *The Paper*, and three Hong Kong media—*Oriental Daily*, Phoenix TV and the *South China Morning Post*.

The list of 45 confession broadcasts that were located for this report is not an exhaustive number—confessions by detainees are commonplace on Chinese television for less famous, petty crimes. The 45 in this study represent the high-profile cases that are

reported by English-language media. Since the focus of this study was on high-profile cases and due to limitations in time and resources, no attempt was made to find all televised confessions between 2013 to 2018. This study estimates that number may be in the hundreds, if not thousands.

The main television channels that aired confessions were *Xinwen Lianbo* (新闻联播), the main national daily news broadcast at 7pm and 9pm in China;⁹⁶ the English-language channel, CCTV9 (rebranded as CGTN); CCTV's *Zhongguo Xinwen* (中国新闻) program (Chinese-language channel CCTV4 is broadcast globally as well as inside China); CCTV13, the national 24-hours news channel, of which the main programs were *Morning News* (朝闻天下), *Oriental Horizon* (东方时空), *Live News* (新闻直播间) and *24 Hours* (24 小时). Because different versions of the confession news package were aired on multiple channels, the confession scripts that were analysed for this study were chosen using the following hierarchy:⁹⁷ CCTV13 *Morning News*, CCTV13 *Oriental Horizon*, CCTV13 *24 Hours*, CCTV4, XWLB, CCTV9. In a small number of cases the confession appeared only on regional TV (Wenzhou TV) or non-state media, online news site, *The Paper*, and three Hong Kong-based media, Phoenix TV, *Oriental Daily* and the *South China Morning Post*. If non-state TV was used, all available broadcasts were analysed. The selected broadcast's confession was transcribed and then, if needed, translated into English.

For each of the 45 confession broadcasts, the following data was collected: main confessor name, list of supporting confessors and number, main confessor gender, nationality/ethnicity/, case type (rights, other), location of security agency holding the detainee, and outcome of their case (for example, released on bail, sentenced, executed).

Each confession script was coded according to whether it included statements directly supporting the CCP or any of its agencies or CCP actions ("defend"); statements of self-criticism or criticism of another ("denounce"); or any statement that was an obvious response to criticisms from overseas, Hong Kong or at home ("denial").

The visual setting for the confession was coded either "jailhouse" (suspect was wearing prison vest and/or handcuffs, was behind bars, was shown with uniformed police, and location was clearly a detention centre or police station) or "neutral" (suspect was wearing civilian clothes, was not wearing handcuffs, there was no sign of uniformed police, and the location was not obviously a cell or interrogation room).

The scope of this study

Only televised confessions with detainees (usually called "suspect," 犯罪嫌疑人 in Chinese) were used in this study. All were either pre-arrest or pre-trial except for Hong Kong bookseller Lam Wing-kee and rights lawyer Wang Yu, whose confessions were broadcast following their release on bail. These were included because they were both technically still suspects. Lam skipped bail by remaining in Hong Kong, while Wang Yu was under "non-release release" conditions and as her testimony in this report shows, she was not actually released until she had made the media interview. Confessions under other circumstances, such as televised courtroom confessions, that are growing increasingly popular, were not included.

As part of Xi Jinping's crackdown on corruption, dozens of confessions by detained CCP officials have been posted on the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CDIC) website⁹⁸ and several have also been aired on state media. Because in the first stages of an investigation, CCP members are not handled by the Security Bureau, rather they are overseen

by the CDIC, their cases are investigated under the secretive shuanggui (雙規) process. The motivations for these types of confessions are likely to differ from those of the general public and so they do not form part of this study. The exception is Lin Zuluan (林祖鑾) who has been included because from media reports it appears he was detained by regular police.

Appendix II: THE CONFESSIONS

| # | Date | Name (CN) | Type | Setting | Location |
|----|------------|------------------------------|--------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | 2013-07-15 | Liang Hong | Other | Neutral | Hunan |
| 2 | 2013-08-22 | Qin Huohuo - Lier Chaisi | Rights | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 3 | 2013-08-27 | Peter Humphrey | Other | Jailhouse | Shanghai |
| 4 | 2013-08-29 | Charles Xue | Rights | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 5 | 2013-09-15 | Charles Xue | Rights | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 6 | 2013-09-29 | Dong Liangjie - Charles Xue | Rights | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 7 | 2013-10-17 | Dong Rubin | Rights | Jailhouse | Yunnan |
| 8 | 2013-10-22 | Ge Qiwei | Rights | Jailhouse | Hunan |
| 9 | 2013-10-26 | Chen Yongzhou | Rights | Jailhouse | Hunan |
| 10 | 2014-05-08 | Gao Yu | Rights | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 11 | 2014-05-13 | Xiang Nanfu | Rights | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 12 | 2014-05-31 | Zhang Lidong | Other | Jailhouse | Shandong |
| 13 | 2014-06-25 | Mirzat | Other | Jailhouse | Xinjiang |
| 14 | 2014-06-26 | Ning Caishen | Other | Neutral | Beijing |
| 15 | 2014-06-29 | Zhang Yuan | Other | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 16 | 2014-07-14 | Peter Humphrey | Other | Jailhouse | Shanghai |
| 17 | 2014-08-04 | Guo Meimei | Other | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 18 | 2014-08-19 | Ko-Chen-tung | Other | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 19 | 2014-08-27 | Nurmemet Abidilimit | Other | Jailhouse | Xinjiang |
| 20 | 2014-09-25 | Wang Xin | Other | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 21 | 2014-09-26 | Ilham Tohti offscreen target | Rights | Jailhouse | Xinjiang |
| 22 | 2014-09-29 | Shen Hao | Rights | Jailhouse | Shanghai |
| 23 | 2014-11-21 | Shen Hao | Rights | Jailhouse | Shanghai |
| 24 | 2015-06-22 | Zhai Yanmin - Liu Jianjun | Rights | Jailhouse | Shandong |
| 25 | 2015-07-12 | 709 crackdown lawyers | Rights | Neutral | Beijing |
| 26 | 2015-07-19 | Zhou Shifeng | Rights | Neutral | Beijing |
| 27 | 2015-07-19 | Tursan | Other | Jailhouse | Xinjiang |
| 28 | 2015-07-20 | Ai Ke Abai Er | Other | Jailhouse | Xinjiang |
| 29 | 2015-08-31 | Wang Xiaolu | Rights | Neutral | Beijing |
| 30 | 2015-10-17 | Wang Yu | Rights | Jailhouse | Tianjin |
| 31 | 2015-11-26 | Jiang Yefei | Rights | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 32 | 2016-01-17 | Gui Minhai | Rights | Neutral | Zhejiang |
| 33 | 2016-01-19 | Peter Dahlin | Rights | Neutral | Beijing |
| 34 | 2016-02-01 | Ding Ning | Other | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 35 | 2016-02-25 | Zhang Kai | Rights | Neutral | Zhejiang |
| 36 | 2016-02-28 | Gui Minhai | Rights | Neutral | Zhejiang |
| 37 | 2016-04-15 | Taiwanese telecom fraud | Other | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 38 | 2016-05-02 | Taiwanese telecom fraud | Other | Jailhouse | Beijing |
| 39 | 2016-05-15 | Xu Qin | Other | Jailhouse | Shanghai |
| 40 | 2016-06-21 | Lin Zuluán | Other | Jailhouse | Guangdong |
| 41 | 2016-07-06 | Lam Wing-kee | Rights | Jailhouse | Zhejiang |
| 42 | 2016-08-01 | Wang Yu | Rights | Neutral | Tianjin |
| 43 | 2017-03-02 | Jiang Tianyong | Rights | Neutral | Hunan |
| 44 | 2017-05-09 | Xie Yang | Rights | Neutral | Hunan |
| 45 | 2018-02-09 | Gui Minhai | Rights | Neutral | Zhejiang |

SCRIPTED AND STAGED

Appendix III: MAIN CONFESSORS

| # | Name (EN) | Name (CN) | Gender | Nationality or ethnicity | # as MC | SC |
|----|---------------------|-----------|--------|--------------------------|---------|-----|
| 1 | Liang Hong | 梁鸿 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 2 | Qin Huohuo | 秦火火 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 3 | Lierchaisi | 立二拆四 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 4 | Peter Humphrey | | M | UK | 2 | no |
| 5 | Charles Xue | 薛必群 | M | US | 3 | no |
| 6 | Dong Liangjie | 董良杰 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 7 | Dong Rubin | 董如彬 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 8 | Ge Qiwei | 格祺伟 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 9 | Chen Yongzhou | 陈永洲 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 10 | Gao Yu | 高瑜 | F | CH | 1 | no |
| 11 | Xiang Nanfu | 向南夫 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 12 | Zhang Lidong | 张立冬 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 13 | Mirzat | | M | UI | 1 | no |
| 14 | Ning Caishen | 宁财神 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 15 | Zhang Yuan | 张元 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 16 | Guo Meimei | 郭美美 | F | CH | 1 | no |
| 17 | Ko Chen-tung | 柯震东 | M | TW | 1 | no |
| 18 | Nurmemet Abidilimit | | M | UI | 1 | no |
| 19 | Wang Xin | 王欣 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 20 | Shen Hao | 沈灏 | M | CH | 2 | no |
| 21 | Zhai Yanmin | 翟岩民 | M | CH | 1 | yes |
| 22 | Liu Jianjun | 刘建军 | M | CH | 1 | yes |
| 23 | Zhou Shifeng | 周世锋 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 24 | Tursan | | M | UI | 1 | no |
| 25 | Ai Ke Abai Er | | M | UI | 1 | no |
| 26 | Wang Xiaolu | 王晓璐 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 27 | Wang Yu | 王宇 | F | CH | 2 | no |
| 28 | Jiang Yefei | 姜野飞 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 29 | Gui Minhai | 桂敏海 | M | SW | 3 | no |
| 30 | Peter Dahlin | | M | SW | 1 | no |
| 31 | Ding Ning | 丁宁 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 32 | Zhang Kai | 张凯 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 33 | Lam Wing-kee | 林荣基 | M | HK | 1 | yes |
| 34 | Xu Qin | 徐勤 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 35 | Lin Zuluán | 林祖銓 | M | CH | 1 | no |
| 36 | Xie Yang | 谢阳 | M | CH | 1 | yes |
| 37 | Jiang Tianyong | 江天勇 | M | CH | 1 | no |

| | |
|----|----------------------|
| CH | Han Chinese |
| UI | Uighur |
| HK | Hongkonger |
| TW | Taiwanese |
| SW | Swedish |
| UK | British |
| US | American |
| MC | Main confessor |
| SC | Supporting confessor |

Appendix IV: THE 45 CONFESSIONS BY CASE

2013

Date: 15 July 2013

Main confessor: Liang Hong (梁鸿)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2013/07/15/VIDE1373895000552949.shtml>

Liang Hong was British pharmaceutical firm GlaxoSmithKline's (GSK's) vice-president and operations manager in China. The company was accused of bribing officials and doctors to boost medicine sales in China and of laundering the money through hundreds of travel agencies. In this confession in which Mr. Liang appears in a polo shirt, he describes how he used a Shanghai travel agency in "dealing with government departments." Weng Jianyong (翁剑雍), from one of those travel agencies, appears in the broadcast as a supporting confessor. Mr. Liang was sentenced the following year to a two-year jail sentence with a three-year suspension.

Date: 22 August 2013

Main confessors: Qin Huohuo (秦火火) and Lierchaisi (立二拆四)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2013/08/22/VIDE1377146162025323.shtml>

Qin Huohuo (real name, Qin Zhihui) was a marketing associate for a Beijing marketing firm called Erma, founded by Lierchaisi (real name, Yang Xiuyu). The two were arrested for posting false rumours on Weibo including one that disparaged Communist Chinese "martyr" Lei Feng as well as fake celebrity gossip. Their confessions, and a string of others in the following months, coincided with a crackdown on influential users of social media. In 2014, Mr. Qin was handed down a three-year jail sentence, while Lierchaisi was given four years.

Date: 27 August 2013

Main confessors: Peter Humphrey

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://english.cntv.cn/program/newshour/20130827/102867.shtml>

Brit Peter Humphrey ran a corporate investigations firm in Shanghai called ChinaWhys with his American wife Yu Yingzeng. Earlier that year he had been investigating a case for GSK. In the Chinese language broadcasts of this confession, his face is blurred, but in the CCTV9 (English) version his face is not concealed. His wife was also arrested and appears flanked by police in this confession broadcast but she is not shown talking. He was accused of trading in Chinese citizen's private information and sentenced to 2.5 years, an unusually harsh sentence for this crime. He was released a few months before his sentence ended on medical

grounds. He claims that his case was linked to the GSK bribery case and he was “collateral damage.”⁹⁹

Date: 29 August 2013

Main confessor: Charles Xue (薛必群)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2013/08/29/VIDE1377733921810786.shtml>

Charles Xue is an American-Chinese venture capitalist and popular blogger (in 2013, he had 12 million followers). His posts were sometimes critical of the government. In this broadcast, the first of three, he appears with several women supporting confessors who have their identities hidden and who claim that he paid them for sex and that he also liked to have group sex. He was released on bail in April 2014 on medical grounds, but not before he had made two other confession broadcasts (see below).

Date: 15 September 2013

Main confessor: Charles Xue

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2013/09/15/VIDE1379203800728596.shtml>

In his second confession, Charles Xue now talks about how his vanity caused him to act irresponsibly online and to forward posts without checking them. He also argues in support of a law to regulate social media.

Date: 29 September 2013

Main confessors: Dong Liangjie (董良杰) and Charles Xue

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2013/09/29/VIDE1380411241755649.shtml>

Dong Liangjie is an environmentalist and businessman. He was accused of using popular bloggers, such as Charles Xue, to help promote his water filter company by spreading false rumours about the environment, including one about China’s tap water containing high levels of contraceptives. Mr. Dong was released in June 2014 on the grounds that his crimes were too insignificant.¹⁰⁰ Charles Xue also appears to talk about how important Internet controls are and expresses a hope that his friends won’t make the same mistakes he did.

Date: 17 October 2013

Main confessor: Dong Rubin (董如彬)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2013/10/17/VIDE1381963675955800.shtml>

Yunnan-based Dong Rubin, who had blogged about official corruption and police brutality, was arrested in 2013 for illegal business activities connected with his communications company. In his televised confession he said he had posted hyped up news for his clients. Hou Peng (侯鹏), the general manager of his company, also appeared as a supporting confessor. Dong was sentenced to six and a half years for additional crimes, including blogging fake information for clients, in the summer of 2014.

Date: 22 October 2013

Main confessor: Ge Qiwei (格祺伟)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2013/10/22/VIDE1382445240328853.shtml>

Ge Qiwei, another “Weibo celebrity” and independent reporter is accused of extortion and spreading rumours on the Internet. In this confession video, Mr. Ge admits to criminal behaviour. In 2016, he is finally sentenced to six years for extortion.¹⁰¹

Date: 26 October 2013

Main confessor: Chen Yongzhou (陈永洲)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2013/10/26/VIDE1382748603776177.shtml>

In the months before his arrest, Chen Yongzhou, a journalist with the Guangdong-based *New Express* newspaper, had written several articles about Zoomlion, a partially state-owned company that makes construction equipment, reporting that it had committed illegal business practices. After he was detained, his paper put out two front-page ads calling for his release, a bold and unusual move. After the televised confession was broadcast—in which he said he had accepted bribes to run stories—the paper retracted its appeal. In 2014, Chen was sentenced to a year and 10 months on charges of defamation and bribery.¹⁰²

2014

Date: 8 May 2014

Main confessor: Gao Yu (高瑜)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/05/08/VIDE1399508847095305.shtml>

Gao Yu, a veteran journalist, and at the time 70 years old, was detained in April 2014, making her television appearance a month later in May, in which she confessed to “endangering state interests”. A day before her trial she told her lawyer that her confession was forced because she was protecting her son—he was initially detained but then later released.¹⁰³ In April 2015, she was sentenced to seven years, but in November 2015, this was reduced to five and she was moved to house arrest on medical grounds.

Date: 13 May 2014

Main confessor: Xiang Nanfu (向南夫)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://tv.cntv.cn/video/C10598/fa5150dd5c4f4e3baf040722f1df1f9c>

Xiang Nanfu was a writer for the overseas Chinese website, Boxun. He gave his confession a little over a week after he was detained on charges of picking quarrels and provoking trouble and publishing fake stories about China on the Boxun site, including on organ harvesting and police brutality. In his televised confession he said he exaggerated and made up stories and also had sex with petitioners. He was released in August because he was remorseful and had admitted his guilt.

Date: 31 May 2014

Main confessor: Zhang Lidong (张立冬)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/05/31/VIDE1401539442451940.shtml>

Just three days after a woman was beaten and stamped to death in a McDonald's one of the attackers, Zhang Lidong appeared on television, with his head shaved and behind bars, confessing to killing her because she was an "evil spirit". Zhang said he belonged to a banned Christian cult called Church of the Almighty God. This is one of the few confession broadcasts in which the journalist is also filmed. He was executed in February 2015.

Date: 25 June 2014

Main confessor: Mirzat

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/06/21/VIDE1403354160905305.shtml>

Mirzat, a young Uighur man, confessed to attacking people with an axe in a mahjong parlour in Hotan, a city in Xinjiang, with two other men. **Mirzat was the only Uighur suspect in this study that did not have his head shaved;** a white dressing had been put on a head wound, and his speech was slurred. The journalist appeared to be trying to show him as someone ignorant of Islam—to each question about the religion he answers: "I don't know".

Date: 26 June 2014

Main confessor: Ning Caishen (宁财神)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://tv.cntv.cn/video/C10336/1ce8ff167d9e424bb3a36f8878c97378>

In his televised confession, TV screenwriter Ning Caishen (real name, Chen Wanning) confessed to taking crystal meth. With his face blurred, he apologised and said that drugs were bad for your health. His detention was part of a spate of celebrity arrests in conjunction with "one of the country's biggest crackdowns on drugs in recent memory."¹⁰⁴ He was released less than two weeks later following the end of his administrative detention.

Date: 29 June 2014

Main confessor: Zhang Yuan (张元)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://tv.cntv.cn/video/C10336/6039d58a4b36412890205fbb1e3ec2b0>

Independent film director Zhang Yuan was detained after police tried to test him at a Beijing train station during a random drugs check. Various versions of his confession, with his face blurred, appeared on state television between 25 and 29 June. In one broadcast he spoke at length about the debilitating effects of drugs. Zhang was also released around two weeks afterwards following the end of his administrative detention period.

Date: 14 July 2014

Main confessor: Peter Humphrey

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/07/14/VIDE1405294741931397.shtml>

In his second forced confession (the first was in August 2013), Peter Humphrey talked about how his company acquired information and said that he felt used by GSK (the company caught up in a corruption scandal that Mr. Humphrey's case was linked to). His wife, Yu Yingzeng, also appeared as a supporting confessor and talked briefly about how their company operated. In this confession, Mr. Humphrey appeared more relaxed and is seated opposite a journalist. A few weeks later, their case went to trial.

Date: 4 August 2014

Main confessor: Guo Meimei (郭美美)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/08/04/VIDE1407116343208343.shtml>

Online bad girl celebrity Guo Meimei was detained in July in Beijing for running an illegal gambling business. A few weeks later she made her televised confession in which, unlike other celebrities, her face was not blurred. She talked about her gambling business that she ran with her boyfriend in Beijing. Two men and her assistant also appeared as supporting confessors with their faces blurred. Some claimed her televised confession was used to distract the public from other news.¹⁰⁵ She was sentenced to five years in jail in September 2015.

Date: 19 August 2014

Main confessor: Ko Chen-tung (柯震東)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/08/19/VIDE1408429560342963.shtml>

Taiwanese pop star and actor, Ko Chen-tung, was detained along with Jaycee Chan, the son of kungfu actor Jackie Chan, for smoking marijuana. In his televised confession, Mr. Ko, with his face blurred, cries, and apologizes repeatedly to his fans and his family. He was released 14 days later after his administrative detention ended. His was the third and final high-profile televised confession that coincided with a drugs crackdown in the summer of 2014.

Date: 27 August 2014

Main confessor: Nurmemet Abidilimit

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://tv.cntv.cn/video/C10336/27fe3f7c9f6e4065a1cbbdfd4fea325e>

Uighur suspect Nurmemet Abidilimit appeared on TV with his head shaved and locked to a table, admitting to killing Jume Tahir, the imam of Kashgar's famous Id Kah mosque the month before because his sermons "distorted" Islam. His supporting confessor, Gheni Hasan, also with his head shaved and wrists locked to a table, appeared onscreen simply to say his brother had tried to dissuade him from getting involved. The two men, both teenagers, were sentenced to death a month later.¹⁰⁶

Date: 25 September 2014

Main confessor: Wang Xin (王欣)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/09/25/VIDE1411607168868951.shtml>

Wang Xin, the CEO of Qvod, an online video streaming platform, was accused of allowing porn to be distributed through its services. He fled overseas and was on the run for 110 days before he was arrested overseas in August 2014.¹⁰⁷ In his confession, a month later, he had a shaved head and at one point appeared in a cage. He also appeared distressed. At his second hearing in 2016, he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 42 months in jail.

Date: 26 September 2014

Main target and supporting confessors: Ilham Tohti, his three students appear as supporting confessors: Shohret Nijat (Uighur), Perhat Halmurat (Uighur) and Luo Yuwei (Yi).

Media: CCTV4

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/09/26/VIDE1411691041709354.shtml>

Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti was sentenced to life in prison on 23 September 2014 for separatism. Just three days later, this confession video of three of his students denouncing him was aired on television. The three students were all wearing handcuffs, clad in orange prison vests and behind bars.

Date: 29 September 2014

Main confessor: Shen Hao (沈灏)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/09/29/VIDE1412005798743825.shtml>

Shen Hao, the co-founder of *21st Century Business Herald*, was detained on 25 September accused of news extortion. Four days later he appeared along with a number of colleagues as supporting confessors in his first confession. Shen was widely admired for being a pioneer in Chinese investigative reporting.

Date: 21 November 2014

Main confessor: Shen Hao

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/11/21/VIDE1416528111391275.shtml>

Shen Hao appeared in a second lengthy televised confession, again accompanied by a number of former colleagues as supporting confessors (some of them also appeared in the September broadcast). The footage appears to have been taken on separate occasions as in some shots he is wearing a blue top, and others an orange top (as he did in the September confession). At one point he broke down and cried. He confessed to accepting payments from companies to spike negative stories, a practice that is widespread in Chinese media. Many at the time queried why Shen had been singled out.¹⁰⁸ In December 2015 he was sentenced to four years in jail.

2015

Date: 22 June 2015

Main confessors: Zhai Yanmin (翟岩民), Liu Jianjun (刘建军)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2015/06/22/VIDE1434933542294247.shtml>

Zhai Yanmin is a rights activist who worked for Fengrui Law firm. He was detained in June 2015, several weeks before the 709 Crackdown, and this June confession—the broadcast is a lengthy 23 minutes—is one of three he made. He appears with rights lawyer Liu Jianjun. The two talked about how they paid people to protest outside courthouses. In August 2016, Mr. Zhai was convicted on charges of state subversion and sentenced to three years in jail. Mr. Liu was released a year later on bail. No charges were laid.

Date: 12 July 2015

Offscreen targets: Zhou Shifeng (周世锋), Wu Gan (吴淦), Liu Sixin (刘四新), Zhao Wei (赵威)

Supporting confessors: Zhai Yanmin, Liu Xing, Huang Liqun

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2015/07/12/VIDE1436662081249696.shtml>

The supporting confessors in this video—in which activist Liu Xing is shown with his head shaved and in a prison vest, whereas the two others are in civilian clothes and plain background, denigrate Zhou Shifeng as unprofessional and sleazy and Wu Gan as a troublemaker. Huang Liqun appears to be reading from a script.

Date: 19 July 2015

Main confessor: Zhou Shifeng; **Offscreen targets:** Wang Yu, Wu Gan

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2015/07/19/VIDE1437264109686345.shtml>

This confession video is almost 28 minutes long and has seven supporting confessors (Huang Liqun, Xie Yuandong, Liu Sixin, Mr. Gou (Gou Hongguo), Zhai Yanmin, Liu Xing, and Liu Jianjun) as well as a short appearance on very poor quality video from Zhou Shifeng. In this broadcast, Mr. Liu has had his head shaved and appears much thinner. In his confession, Mr. Zhou talked cautiously saying only that his law firm had “engaged in illegal acts.” In August 2016, he was sentenced to seven years for state subversion.

Date: 19 July 2015

Main confessor: Tursan

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2015/07/19/VIDE1437237355513309.shtml>

Tursan, a 23-year-old Uighur, was part of a CCTV4 documentary about jihadi migration. He was the only Uighur who was labelled a criminal suspect and had his face blurred in the program; there were also half a dozen other Uighurs, including one woman, all in prison vests, with their heads shaved (apart from the woman) and without their faces blurred. They were labelled as East Turkestan Islamic Movement members (an armed separatist group in Xinjiang) not suspects. Tursan talked glowingly about his education in China and how he had been tricked into going overseas in the name of jihad. At one point in the video, he spoke in English, and also cried when he mentioned how much he misses his mother. It is not known what happened to Tursan.

Date: 20 July 2015

Main confessor: Ai Ke Abai Er

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.163.com/15/0720/10/AUVA7GVV0001124J.html>

Ai Ke Abai Er is filmed talking about his disillusionment with jihadi migration. He said he went to Turkey to train as a terrorist and then returned to China and plotted to bomb a shopping mall in Shijiazhuang in Hebei province. It is not known what happened to Ai Ke Abai Er. In early July, just a few weeks before this and the previous confession aired, Thailand deported 109 Uighurs back to China.¹⁰⁹

Date: 31 August 2015

Main confessor: Wang Xiaolu (王晓璐)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2015/08/31/VIDE1440981721362381.shtml>

Wang Xiaolu, a journalist for the financial news magazine *Caijing*, was detained on 25 August for writing an allegedly fake story about stockmarket instabilities that summer. He confessed to getting his information through “improper channels” and adding his own ideas to make a “sensational” story. Wang was one of around 200 people arrested connected with the stockmarket crashes that summer. He was released sometime in early 2016 without charge.

Date: 17 October 2015

Main confessor: Wang Yu (王宇)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2015/10/17/VIDE1445038921662355.shtml>

This confession, Wang Yu’s first of two, occurred when she was detained under RSDL. It followed the arrest of activists who were caught trying to help her teenaged son escape across the border into Myanmar. The news made international headlines. This exploitative broadcast show Ms. Wang and her husband Bao Longjun extremely distressed about their son’s situation.

Date: 26 November 2015

Main confessor: Jiang Yefei (姜野飞)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2015/11/26/VIDE1448490424517140.shtml>

Jiang Yefei, a political cartoonist and activist, fled China in 2008 and had been living in Thailand. He appeared with fellow Chinese refugee Dong Guangping as a supporting confessor, talking about how he helped people escape China and make their way to Thailand. Thai authorities handed both men over to China even though they had United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees status. They were flown back to Beijing on 15 November, with Swedish publisher Gui Minhai.¹¹⁰ One report said Jiang’s face was swollen in the confession, indicating he could have been beaten.¹¹¹ He is awaiting trial for inciting subversion of state power and people smuggling.¹¹²

2016

Date: 17 January 2016

Main confessor: Gui Minhai (桂敏海)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2016/01/18/VIDERXA4JRR0qARIMUK3Smng160118.shtml>

Gui Minhai is the Swedish owner of *Mighty Current*, a publisher of racy books about China and its leaders. Mr. Gui was abducted by Chinese security agents from his Thai home in October 2015 and flown back to China. He was one of four other booksellers from Hong Kong who disappeared around the same time. In this, his first of three confession, several months after he went missing, Mr. Gui, at times in tears, confesses to fleeing China while serving a suspended sentence for a 2003 fatal hit and run. It appears that this video was taken at different times because of lighting differences, changes of clothes—black and grey t-shirts and an apparent hair cut—between clips.

SCRIPTED AND STAGED

Date: 10 January 2016

Main confessor: Peter Dahlin

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2016/01/20/VIDEEKYr4ld4N9Jh0oXJZC0K160120.shtml>

Peter Dahlin was a Swedish NGO legal aid worker who was based in Beijing when he was detained in January 2016. A few weeks after he went missing, and amid international press interest in his disappearance, Mr. Dahlin appeared on state TV confessing to “hurting the feelings of the Chinese people” and engaging in criminal activities without specifying what they were. Two of his colleagues, with their faces blurred, also appeared on screen to denounce Mr. Dahlin, accusing him of anti-China crimes. Mr. Dahlin was released in late January and deported from China.

Date: 1 February 2016

Main confessor: Ding Ning (丁宁)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://news.cntv.cn/2016/02/01/VIDE84UkfjggXSFeSbZmw8BP160201.shtml>

Ding Ning, the owner of Ezubao, an online financing platform, was arrested for running his company as a giant Ponzi scheme. His company had once been courted by the Party, it had sponsored the online broadcasts of the National People’s Congress and its logo was in the Great Hall of the People. Many investors, who had been scammed by Ezubao had also been protesting.¹¹³ Mr. Ding, with his head shaved, appeared with several of his staff explaining how the scheme worked. He was sentenced to life in prison in September 2017.¹¹⁴

Date: 25 February 2016

Main confessor: Zhang Kai (张凯)

Media: Wenzhou TV

URL: <http://v.dhtv.cn/201602/00027680.html?from=groupmessage&isappinstalled=0>

Christian lawyer Zhang Kai was detained in August 2015, but he did not appear on television until February 2016, confessing to taking on cases concerning the removal of crosses on churches in Wenzhou because he wanted the money and the fame. His assistant Liu Peng (劉鵬) appeared as a supporting confessor. Mr. Liu accused Mr. Zhang of colluding with overseas forces to hype up his cases. Mr. Zhang was released in March.

Date: 28 February 2016

Main confessor: Gui Minhai

Media: Phoenix TV

URL: Phoenix TV has removed the video from the page. The story is here:

http://news.ifeng.com/a/20160228/47620675_0.shtml

A month after his first confession, Gui Minhai appeared in a second confession, this time with three of the other disappeared Hong Kong booksellers on Phoenix TV admitting to smuggling banned books into the mainland. The other booksellers act as supporting confessors, all accusing Mr. Gui.

Date: 15 April 2016

Main target: Taiwan over telecom fraud; **supporting confessors:** two anonymized

Taiwanese suspects: Mr Jian (简某), Mr Xu (许某)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://tv.cctv.com/2016/04/15/VIDEzWtK28ocd72kDgDkM3sV160415.shtml>

The two Taiwanese supporting confessors appeared in orange prison vests with their faces blurred, heads shaved and sat in interrogation chairs with their hands cuffed. They described how the telecom fraud worked. They were said to be part of a group of 45 Taiwanese deported from Kenya to China in April, which caused a diplomatic spat with Taipei because they were not sent back to Taiwan.

Date: 2 May 2016

Main target: Taiwan over telecom fraud; **supporting confessors:** two anonymized

Taiwanese suspects

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://tv.cctv.com/2016/05/02/VIDElpAgZr6hMVplzFbs3apM160502.shtml>

In this video, the two anonymized Taiwanese suspects say they would prefer to go back to Taiwan to face trial because they would receive much lighter sentences, the implication being that they should be tried in China or they would not be properly punished. Both men have their faces blurred, heads shaved, dressed in prison uniforms and are handcuffed into interrogation chairs.

Date: 15 May 2016

Main confessor: Xu Qin (徐勤)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://tv.cctv.com/2016/05/17/VIDEN5plda1Qi1YSddUhyw76160517.shtml>

Businessman Xu Qin, and owner of Zhongjin Capital Management, was detained in April 2016 on his way to get married at the Vatican.¹¹⁵ He confessed on TV in a blue prison vest and behind bars to operating his company as a Ponzi scheme. The trial started in June 2017.

Date: 21 June 2016

Main confessor: Lin Zuluan (林祖銓)

Media: CCTV (press conference)

URL: <http://tv.cctv.com/2016/06/21/VIDEc8vfJ3959Ho59xkSwHff160621.shtml>

Lin Zuluan was the elected leader of Wukan Village in Guangdong province. Wukan hit global headlines in 2011 when villagers staged huge protests against local corruption and land grabs. After Lin was detained in June 2016, the villagers again staged angry protests. His confession was aired on state TV as part of a televised press conference. Lin was seen on camera talking stiffly and apparently reading from a statement, in which he confessed to taking bribes. After the confession, villagers went on the streets to protest. In September 2016, Lin was sentenced to 37 months; he later appealed saying he had been forced to confess.

Date: 6 July 2016

Main confessor: Lam Wing-kee (林榮基)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://tv.cctv.com/2016/07/06/VIDEgOXIUE4gJdlJzXddwFRp160706.shtml>

Lam Wing-kee was one of the owners of Causeway Bay Books and one of the Hong Kong booksellers who disappeared in late 2015. He surfaced on Phoenix TV in February as a supporting confessor to Gui Minhai's second confession. He was freed on bail in 2016 but forced to work at a library in a small city in Guangdong. In June, he was allowed back to Hong Kong on the condition he returned to the mainland a few days later. Instead, Lam held an explosive press conference in which described how he was detained and forced to make the TV confession. This confession was aired on state TV in July while Lam was in Hong Kong and contains footage of Lam confessing to selling banned books on the mainland, listening to a policeman detail conditions of his bail, and shots of him reading a book and getting his hair cut while in detention.

Date: 1 August 2016

Main confessor: Wang Yu

Media: The Paper, Oriental Daily, Phoenix TV

URL: http://inews.ifeng.com/yidian/49698903/news.shtml?ch=ref_zbs_ydzh_news

In this second confession by Wang Yu, she is sitting in a Tianjin garden and has just been released on bail. She disparaged Zhou Shifeng, human rights organizations, and a US human rights award she had been given weeks earlier, linking them to hostile overseas forces wanting to hurt China.

2017

Date: 2 March 2017

Main confessor: Jiang Tianyong (江天勇)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://tv.cctv.com/2017/03/02/VIDEfhpDkbOn2m0t5JOvTQII170302.shtml>

This deny confession focuses on the rights lawyer Xie Yang's torture allegations whilst under RSDL. Detained rights lawyer Jiang Tianyong confesses that he made the allegation up because he wanted to court western media. We also see Mr. Xie as a supporting confessor smiling behind bars at journalists saying he is in good health and is being looked after well in the detention centre. Both men have their faces blurred. In November 2017, Jiang Tianyong was given a two-year sentence for inciting subversion of state power.

Date: 9 May 2017

Main confessor: Xie Yang (谢阳)

Media: CCTV

URL: <http://tv.cctv.com/2017/05/09/VIDEVAc7cGqzTvQEywLk6JxQ170509.shtml>

In this video released a day after his trial, Mr. Xie said he was never tortured and that he is sorry that he violated his professional ethics as a lawyer. In December 2017, he was found guilty of inciting subversion of state power, but was released without punishment because he had confessed.

2018

Date: 9 February 2018

Main confessor: Gui Minhai

Media: South China Morning Post, Oriental Daily

URL: <https://www.scmp.com/video/china/2132801/gui-minhai-government-arranged-interview-sweden-used-me-pawn-against-china>

After he had been snatched from a train in front of Swedish consular officials by Chinese security agents, Gui Minhai was paraded in front of a group of Hong Kong media in a 20-minute interview. Mr. Gui appeared highly strung, accused Sweden of using him like a “pawn” and said that “My wonderful life has been ruined and I would never trust the Swedish ever again.”

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- ¹ Moore, M. (2013, July 16). GSK executive confesses to bribery on Chinese television. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/pharmaceuticalsandchemicals/10181586/GSK-executive-confesses-to-bribery-on-Chinese-television.html>
- ² For example, please see: Jiang, S. (2016, January 26). Trial by media? Confessions go prime time in China. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/26/asia/china-television-confessions/index.html>
- ³ This decision was made for two reasons. Firstly, for practical reasons in locating the broadcasts and having the manpower to analyse the data, it was only possible to collect and study the high-profile cases. Secondly, the focus of *Scripted and Staged* is on how the Chinese state has been using them as a national and overseas propaganda tool, which is best reflected by the examples of the high-profile cases.
- ⁴ The confession broadcasts of detained CCP officials, suspected of corruption crimes, are not included in this study because they are overseen by the *shuanggui* (双规) system and not the Public Security (PSB) or State Security.
- ⁵ The 709 Crackdown was a nationwide strike against both individual rights defense lawyers and the larger rights defence movement; also known as the “war on lawyers.” The name, 709, comes from the date when the first lawyer was detained, Wang Yu, on 9 July 2015. As part of the crackdown, over a period of months, some 300 lawyers were targeted. Some were sentenced to lengthy prison terms, such as rights defender Hu Shigen. In August 2016 he was given more than seven years in prison for subversion of state power; others were released following lengthy periods of incommunicado detention, torture, and forced confessions, such as lawyer Xie Yang. By many accounts, it has been the largest and most brutal crackdown on civil society since the 1989 Pro-Democracy Movement ended in the Tiananmen Square Massacre.
- ⁶ Jiang, S. (2016, January 26). Trial by media? Confessions go prime time in China. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/26/asia/china-television-confessions/index.html>
- ⁷ The four broadcasts that had no main confessors were: on 26 September 2014, three detained students of Ilham Tohti (a Uighur scholar now serving life in prison for separatism) accused their teacher on camera; on 12 July 2015, lawyers and activists detained during the 709 Crackdown criticized other high-profile rights lawyers including Zhou Shifeng and Wang Yu; and on 15 April and 2 May 2016, Taiwanese suspects who had their identity concealed confessed to being part of a telecom fraud scam that was organized by Taiwanese nationals.
- ⁸ These five were Peter Humphrey (2), Charles Xue (3), Shen Hao (2), Wang Yu (2), and Gui Minhai (3).
- ⁹ For example, Charles Xue confessed to hiring prostitutes in his first confession and then for irresponsibly forwarding posts on China’s version of Twitter, Weibo, in his next two confessions. Gui Minhai confessed to illegally leaving China while serving bail for a fatal car accident in his first confession; in his second he talked about illegal book publishing and sales; while in his third appearance, he said he had been used by Sweden.
- ¹⁰ It is difficult to arrive at an accurate number since different CCTV programs and channels covering the confession often used slightly different edits of the video and this would sometimes include different numbers of supporting confessors. This study identified at least 45 supporting confessors.
- ¹¹ These four were Zhai Yanmin, Liu Jianjun, Lam Wing-kee and Xie Yang.
- ¹² Some examples are Xie Yang’s trial (8 May 2017), retrieved from <http://tv.cctv.com/2017/05/09/VIDE0YshOeBWTkacHiTqDU64170509.shtml>; Xie Yang’s sentencing (27 December 2017), retrieved from <http://tv.cctv.com/2017/12/27/VIDE9wEdiCBriOBINk1978G171227.shtml>; and, Taiwanese NGO worker Lee Ming-che’s trial (12 September 2017), retrieved from <http://tv.cctv.com/2017/09/12/VIDE7yDApSwNpl7vKxgtlQWs170912.shtml>.
- ¹³ These four were Gao Yu, Guo Meimei, and two confessions by Wang Yu.
- ¹⁴ The total here is 41, equal to the 37 main confessors plus the four confessions with no main confessors. These were coded according to the main nationality/ethnicity of the supporting confessors. Ilham Tohti’s confession was coded Uighur; the 709 Crackdown confession was coded Mainland (Han) and the two Taiwan fraud confessions were both coded (Taiwan).
- ¹⁵ Mirzat, the only Uighur detainee whose head was not shown shaved, had a large head wound that had been covered with a dressing.
- ¹⁶ The confessions were coded according to the setting for the main confessor; in some neutral confessions, the main confessor is showing in a neutral setting but one or more of the supporting confessors are filmed in a jailhouse setting.
- ¹⁷ The Hong Kong booksellers are five men who ran a publishing company and bookstore in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong, that produced critical and gossipy books about the CCP. Starting in October 2015, all five mysteriously disappeared and then later turned up in China to appear on television confessing to

various crimes in 2016. In this study, four of the booksellers are classified as main confessors (Gui Minhai and Lam Wing-kee) and supporting confessors (Cheung Jiping and Liu Bo).

¹⁸ *The Guardian*. (2016, February 29) 'Missing' Hong Kong bookseller Lee Bo says he will give up British citizenship. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/29/missing-british-bookseller-appears-on-television>

¹⁹ This confession was not included in the study because Mr. Lee was not labelled a "suspect" in the video and left for Hong Kong shortly after it was made. That is *not* to say he was *not* coerced into making it and was able to speak freely.

²⁰ Lau, M. (2017, June 29). Video surfaces apparently showing terminally ill Nobel Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo's life in prison. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2100495/video-apparently-showing-chinese-activist-liu-xiaobos-prison-life>

²¹ Boehler, P. (2013, October 23). Please release him: Guangdong newspaper in rare public appeal for freedom of journalist. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1337815/please-release-him-guangdong-newspaper-appeals-release-journalist>

²² *BBC*. (2014, September 23). China jails prominent Uighur academic Ilham Tohti for life. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-29321701>

²³ *The Straits Times*. (2015, October 10). Son of Chinese rights lawyer Wang Yu detained in Myanmar: Friend. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/son-of-chinese-rights-lawyer-wang-yu-detained-in-myanmar-friend>

²⁴ Wen, P. (2016, June 22). 'Confession' of China's first democratically-elected mayor Lin Zuluán. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.smh.com.au/world/confession-of-chinas-first-democratically-elected-mayor-lin-zuluán-20160622-gpp16y.html>

²⁵ Siu, P., Ng, K-C. & Fung, O. (2016, June 16). Bookseller Lam Wing-kee reveals explosive details of his mainland China detention, claims Lee Po told him he was 'taken away from Hong Kong.' *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/1976489/bookseller-lam-wing-kee-reveals-explosive-details-his>

²⁶ Please see https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/19428/statement-spokesperson-cases-several-human-rights-defenders-china_en

²⁷ On 9 February 2018, Gui Minhai denounced Sweden in his third televised confession.

²⁸ For example, Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti is vilified by his detained students; in the three 709 Crackdown televised confessions lawyers Zhou Shifeng, Wang Yu, Wang Quanzhang and activist Wu Gan are denounced; and Peter Dahlin was made to accuse human rights defenders Su Changlan, Xing Qingxian, and Wang Quanzhang.

²⁹ For example, this study found defend statements supporting the 2013 campaign against online rumour-mongering and a 2014 drugs crackdown.

³⁰ Indeed, Chinese state media news reports regularly used quote marks around the Chinese term for human rights lawyers "维权律师" in graphics about such cases as a way to disparage their profession.

³¹ On independent journalism see Smith, G. (2017, 9 October). Xi squeezing the life out of Chinese media. *EastAsiaForum*. Retrieved from <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/10/09/xi-squeezing-the-life-out-of-chinas-media/>

³² For example, activist Zhai Yanmin was accused of "gathering a crowd to disrupt order of a public place" and "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" in his televised confessions, but at his trial a year later he was found guilty of subverting state power; rights lawyer Zhou Shifeng was accused of "running a criminal syndicate" and "disturbing social order" in his televised confession; at trial he was sentenced to jail for subversion of state power.

³³ These were journalists Xiang Nanfu and Wang Xiaolu, investor Charles Xue, environmentalist Dong Liangjie, rights activist Liu Jianjun, Swede Peter Dahlin, and lawyers Wang Yu and Zhang Kai.

³⁴ On 26 December 2017, Xie Yang and Wu Gan, two of the last three remaining victims of the 709 Crackdown were sentenced. While both were found guilty—Mr. Xie for incitement to subvert the state and Mr. Wu for state subversion—Mr. Xie, who gave several televised confessions, was allowed to go free, but Wu, who publicly denounced the practice and refused to make one, was sentenced to eight years, the harshest 709 Crackdown sentence to date. Wang Quanzhang, the remaining victim, who is thought to have also resisted making a televised confession, has not been seen once and remains disappeared.

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