

9 February 2021

China: Woman human rights defender Li Qiaochu detained

On 6 February 2020, Beijing-based woman human rights defender **Li Qiaochu** was detained on suspicion of “subversion of State power” and taken to Linyi city in Shandong province, where her partner and human rights defender **Xu Zhiyong** is also detained and facing the same charge. Li Qiaochu’s detention follows her disclosure of Xu Zhiyong’s torture and her advocacy actions targeting the Linyi authorities.

[Li Qiaochu \(李翘楚\)](#) is a feminist, researcher, and human rights defender who has advocated for the rights for workers, migrants, women, and human rights defenders detained in China. After the Beijing authorities began to forcibly evict migrant workers from their residences in the winter of 2017, she along with other academics, civil society organisations, and volunteers [collected and disseminated](#) information to help the evicted migrant workers to secure new jobs and find affordable accommodation. Li Qiaochu also actively supported various #MeToo campaigns by compiling data, writing analyses, and posting them online. During the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, she joined a team of volunteers to provide free masks to sanitation workers and help women experiencing domestic violence during the pandemic. After public security officers began to [detain and target](#) human rights defenders, including Xu Zhiyong, associated with a small, [private gathering](#) of activists that took place in December 2019 in Xiamen, Fujian province to discuss rule of law and reforms in China, Li Qiaochu started to campaign online for the release of these defenders facing reprisals from the authorities.

On 5 February 2021, Li Qiaochu [tweeted](#) that a police officer surnamed ‘Guo’ from the Haidian District in Beijing asked her to meet him for “a talk” near her residence at 3:00pm the following day. On the morning of 6 February, before meeting ‘Guo’ she [tweeted](#) details of torture and ill-treatment suffered by Xu Zhiyong during RSDL in 2020. She became uncontactable after the scheduled meeting with the police. Her parents were later taken to a police station and shown a detention notice indicating she is suspected of “subversion of State power”. The police informed her parents that public security officers have taken Li Qiaochu to Linyi in Shandong province, approximately 650 kilometres south of Beijing.

On 21 January 2021, lawyers were allowed to talk via a video-link to Xu Zhiyong, her partner, for the first time, who revealed that the Linshu County Detention Centre, where he is currently held, provides severely inadequate food, both in quantity and quality. He receives only one steamed bun per meal, and as a result the human rights defender is constantly hungry. The detention centre also sells food and other daily products to detainees at prices that are three times higher than the market prices. Recently, another human rights defender, Ding Jiayi, who is also detained at the same location as Xu Zhiyong, also disclosed details of torture under RSDL in Shandong in 2020 and the lack of adequate food in the Linshu County Detention Centre.

On 31 January 2021, Li Qiaochu filed a freedom of information request to the Detention Centre demanding they disclose information regarding the provision of food to detainees, including the criteria used by the Detention Centre for determining the food portion for detainees and prices of goods sold to them; the identity and contact information of officials responsible for such determination, procurement, and oversight; and the Detention Centre’s budget and expenditure on food for detainees. On 2 February 2021, Li Qiaochu lodged a complaint before the Shandong Provincial Department of Public Security against the Linyi Municipal Public Security Bureau and the Linshu County Detention Centre for reducing food as a form of punishment against Xu Zhiyong and for violating standards stipulated by national authorities concerning food portion for detainees and prices of goods sold to them.

On 16 February 2020, hours after her partner and human rights defender Xu Zhiyong was detained in southern China, Li Qiaochu herself disappeared and was later confirmed detained under “residential surveillance at a designated location” (RSDL), a form of enforced disappearance provided for by the Criminal Procedure Law where police have the power to detain someone in a secret location for up to six months without access to family or lawyer. In late 2020, she published a detailed account of her experience during four months of RSDL detention. Following her release from RSDL, local public security officers repeatedly summoned Li Qiaochu for questioning, accounts of which she also published on Twitter, and threatened her with detention if she continued to speak out online about Xu Zhiyong, who was also placed under RSLD in Shandong in 2020.

Front Line Defenders believes the harassment and latest detention of Li Qiaochu is a reprisal for her legitimate activities in defence of human rights, including the rights of other human rights defenders to freedom from torture and other ill-treatment.

Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in China to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Li Qiaochu, and cease and refrain from all forms of harassment and surveillance against her and her family;
2. Pending her release, guarantee her physical and psychosocial integrity in detention, and ensure that she is not subjected to any form of torture or other ill-treatment;
3. Pending her release, ensure that she has immediate, regular and unrestricted access to legal counsel of her choice, and is able to communicate with family members, without undue interference;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in China are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with China’s international human rights obligations and commitments;
5. Initiate a comprehensive legal reform process, in genuine consultation with independent civil society and human rights defenders, to review existing laws, regulations, policies and practices, especially the provisions related to national security offences, that have been used to target human rights defenders, with a view to align them with China’s obligations under international human rights law and standards.