

China threatening to kill me, B.C. reporter says

Staffer for Falun Gong-linked TV station told he's not safe in Canada; Mounties take report 'seriously'

BY ANDREA WOO, VANCOUVER SUN SEPTEMBER 23, 2010



Vancouver based NTD TV correspondent Tao Wang claims the Chinese government has harassed and threatened him in an effort to prevent him from reporting stories.

Photograph by: Ric Ernst, PNG

A Surrey-based reporter says China's Ministry of State Security is threatening his family, life and livelihood for his critical coverage of the Chinese government.

Surrey resident Tao Wang moved to B.C. from China in 2007 and began working as a local general assignment reporter for the Canadian branch of Falun Gong-affiliated New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV) in July 2009.

Most of his assignments for the international broadcaster have been innocuous, on topics such as the opening of the Canada Line, the Olympics and the harmonized sales tax.

However, some of his reports have been critical of the Chinese government and its practices. NTDTV is one of the few networks with dissenting views that broadcasts in the Communist nation.

"Some of the reports I think they don't like are on David Matas, the Nobel Prize nominee and human rights lawyer who spoke at the International Congress of the Transplant Society in Vancouver, talking

about his investigation regarding organ harvesting of Falun Gong practitioners in China," Wang said. "I've also done reports on [Canadian Security Intelligence Service director] Richard Fadden's comments about foreign interference on Canadian governments."

He said the threatening phone calls began a month ago and have become increasingly harsh, escalating to the point of death threats.

Const. Peter Neily of Surrey RCMP confirmed to The Vancouver Sun that the detachment's major crimes section has launched an investigation into the matter.

"We're taking this very seriously and we're in the process of speaking with witnesses and trying to determine followup from here," Neily said. "I can also say we're engaged with the complainant in creating a safety plan. We'll review their current arrangements ... to make sure they're safe while we investigate our file."

Wang, who also owns a company in China that sells medical equipment to retailers, said the threats began in August when several of his company's clients were visited by agents of China's Ministry of State Security (MSS).

"They told them that I participated in illegal activities in Canada that are harmful to the national security of China and asked them to stop doing business with my company," a nervous-sounding Wang told The Vancouver Sun.

On Sept. 2, he said, a man who identified himself as an MSS agent passed a phone number along through a company manager in China, telling Wang to call him.

"I asked him why he interfered with my business and he said, 'You are a smart man; you should know the reason very well,' " Wang said.

"[Eventually] he said, 'Your activity in Canada is a threat to China's national security....' He said I must stop all activities in Canada, which, in my understanding, is my reporting with NTDTV. This is the only thing I do. He said if I don't follow instruction, they will take [further] action on my company."

On Sept. 14, an agent relayed another message via a company manager, this time telling Wang to submit a written guarantee not to participate in any political activity in Canada. When these requests went unanswered, Wang said he received another phone call from the agents — and a threat against his life.

"They said, 'You actually think there is nothing we can do to you because you are in Canada?' They also mentioned, 'If you ever go public on this, you are — in Chinese words — seeking death.' I believe it was a very clear message."

The same day, Sept. 17, two MSS agents went to Wang's company in China.

"[They] sealed up all bank accounts and inventory and threatened [all 10 of] my employees. They became jobless," Wang said.

Besides contacting the RCMP, Wang also went to his Member of Parliament. He said Russ Hiebert's office told him Wednesday it has asked the public safety and foreign affairs ministers to look into the matter. The ministers' offices did not return The Sun's requests for comments by press time, but Neily said the RCMP could team with other agencies for the investigation.

"With files of this nature, that may have an international repercussion, there are various agencies that we could liaise with in order to determine the scope of it internationally," Neily said.

The Sun's calls to the Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Vancouver for comment were not returned.

This is not the first time NTDTV has received threats. From April to June 2005, the broadcaster's Toronto office received five envelopes containing a mysterious white powder, at least one of which was confirmed to be boric acid.

The envelopes were all addressed to "Falun Dafa," also called Falun Gong — defined by supporters as a spiritual movement that embraces truthfulness, compassion and forbearance, and by the Chinese government as an "evil cult." The Chinese Communist Party banned Falun Gong in 1999.

While not all NTDTV employees are Falun Gong practitioners, Wang has no doubt the affiliation is a large part of the reason the broadcaster has drawn the government's ire.

In January 2004, the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Toronto sent a memo, obtained by The Vancouver Sun, to sponsors and supporters of NTDTV's annual Chinese New Year gala, urging them not to participate due to "the nature of [the Falun Gong] organization."

In July 2010, according to The Toronto Star, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's office bowed to China's requests to block reporters from NTDTV and The Epoch Times — both Falun Gong-affiliated outlets critical of the Chinese government — from covering President Hu Jintao's public appearances in Ottawa.

Joe Wang, president of NTDTV Canada, praised Tao Wang's decision to go public.

"I'm very proud of him; I know it's not an easy decision," he said.

"They don't believe in what's right, the Chinese government. They only believe in power, and I think in this case, the power is the truth.... For a civilized society, this kind of thing cannot be tolerated. If [Tao Wang] has really done something illegal, work with the RCMP in Canada and arrest him. But threatening? Bullying? It's like a gang, especially from a powerful government. This cannot be tolerated."

The station has recommended Tao Wang stay home from work for a few days, but Wang has vowed to return to work soon and continue reporting as usual.

"I will keep doing this," he said. "Someone has to stand up and say, 'Yes, you are powerful, and you have all these secret agents and resources, but this is Canada. The job I choose is my personal decision. The more scared they are, it means my work is valuable. It means it's effective; why else would they target me?'"

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