

The Chinese Government Must End Reprisal Against Li Qiaochu for Exposing Torture



(Chinese Human Rights Defenders, February X) The Chinese government must immediately end its detention of human rights defender Li Qiaochu (李翘楚). Ms. Li, a women's rights and labor rights activist, was detained in likely retaliation against her for disclosing the details of torture suffered by her partner, legal scholar and civil rights advocate [Xu Zhiyong](#). Without access to legal counsel of her choice, Li Qiaochu is now at high risk of torture and other forms of ill-treatment.

On 6 February 2021, [a Beijing police officer](#) with the surname of Guo asked Li Qiaochu to come out and talk (约谈) with him, but then, in a surprise move, Li Qiaochu was taken away by police officers from Linyi, Shandong, where Xu Zhiyong is also being held. Li's parents were then told to come to the Yuqiao police station in Beijing to sign a detention notice, which they were not allowed to read. Li's father saw that the notice said that she was being held on the charge of "subversion." He refused to sign.

On 19 February 2021, Li Qiaochu's lawyer, Li Guopei, [sent a request](#) to the Linyi City police requesting a lawyer's visit. The lawyer learned that, while she is nominally detained by the Linyi City Detention Center, she is currently being held at a hospital in Linyi for "quarantine purposes," and will later be transferred to the Linyi City Detention Center.

Retaliation for Exposing Torture

Li Qiaochu's last [tweet](#) went out on 5 February 2021, just one day before she was taken away by police. In it, she made public the details about the torture that Xu Zhiyong sustained while in detention. During mid-May of 2020, police allegedly tied Xu Zhiyong's legs and hands firmly to an interrogation chair, which led Xu to have some difficulties in breathing. According to Li, during this period, Xu was frequently deprived of adequate drinking water or food. He was only allowed to eat one *mantou* (a bland Chinese bun) per meal, causing him to go hungry. Xu said that the detention center did not provide proper heating equipment or hot water, causing severe cold in the winter. And he was only able to take 2-3 cold showers per month. Xu told his lawyer that he was [also subjected](#) to sleep deprivation.

Before being detained, Li Qiaochu posted [many tweets](#) that were critical of the abusive, inhumane, and unlawful ways in which the Linyi detention center in Shandong mistreated Xu Zhiyong and another human rights lawyer [Ding Jiayi](#). According to Li and Ding's wife, Ding Jiayi was subjected to sleep deprivation, with seven days and seven nights of non-stop interrogation and he was only allowed to eat a 1/4 of a *mantou* per meal for half of a month. For one week, detention center staff also [limited the amount](#) of water Ding Jiayi could drink to just 600ml a day.

More broadly, Li Qiaochu may also have been targeted in retaliation for her engagement with UN mechanisms. On 24 September 2020, Luo Shengchun, the wife of Ding Jiayi, [tweeted](#) that she, Li Qiaochu, and a family member of one of the three detained staffers at the NGO Changsha Funeng had an online meeting with two experts from the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID).

The Chinese government, as a party to the Convention Against Torture, has an obligation to support anyone who reports or documents torture, like Li Qiaochu, and to investigate allegations of torture that Xu Zhiyong and Ding Jiayi are reportedly subjected to, and hold the torturers accountable. Instead, Chinese authorities detained Li on trumped up criminal charges. Silencing Li Qiaochu by subjecting her to arbitrary detention and likely torture, the Chinese government has doubled down in breaching its international human rights treaty obligations.

Background

[Li Qiaochu](#) has long been an advocate against gender-based violence, for labour rights, and for the building of civil society more broadly. Li, 30, graduated from Renmin University, earned a master's degree in public policy from the University of York in England in 2015. She went on to work as a research assistant at Tsinghua University, analyzing China's pension system and other policy issues. Some of her most recent activism includes:

- In 2017, when some districts in Beijing initiated a controversial campaign to forcibly remove internal migrant workers, derisively referred to as "low-end population" (低端人口), Li volunteered to provide information and resources to affected migrant workers so that they could obtain new, affordable housing and employment.
- Li increased visibility of China's #MeToo movement by compiling data about relevant cases of sexual harassment.
- Li helped garner greater publicity to combat the exploitative "966" work culture, in which people are forced to work from 9am to 9pm, six days a week. Despite nominally breaking many Chinese laws and regulations, the practice is particularly prevalent in the tech sector and other parts of the digital economy.

- Li sought to support family members of China's detained and persecuted prisoners of conscience by speaking out publicly about their plight on Twitter and other social media platforms.
- When COVID-19 broke out, she participated in online efforts to provide much-needed PPE to sanitation workers in Beijing.
- She spoke out about allegation of torture that detained human rights lawyer [Chang Weiping](#) was reportedly subjected to and the harassment against his family in the days before her detention.

Due to her longstanding advocacy efforts, Li Qiaochu had become a target of security police in China's "social stability" maintenance apparatus. In particular, after human rights lawyers and human rights defenders had a social gathering in Xiamen on 26 December 2019, police around China have been [detaining](#) and tracking down many of the participants and their family members. After Li Qiaochu's partner Xu Zhiyong participated in the Xiamen event, authorities eventually detained him and her as well. On 31 December 2019, Li was summoned by [police](#), and she was subsequently held incommunicado from 16 February 2020 to 19 June 2020. At the time, CHRDR reported that police also denied Li's lawyer, Song Yusheng, from accessing his client.

CHRDR urges the Chinese government to unconditionally and immediately free Li Qiaochu and others who were detained for defending and exercising their human rights. The government must investigate allegations of torture and other forms of inhumane punishment that Xu Zhiyong, Jiang Jiayi, and Chang Weiping have been subjected to, and hold perpetrators criminally responsible, complying to Chinese law and the government's treaty obligations under the Convention against Torture.

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