

Seven Maoist Students Detained in Beijing After Talking to Foreign Media

2019-01-25

Authorities in China have detained seven members of Marxism study groups at two top universities amid a nationwide crackdown on Maoist supporters of a labor movement in the southern province of Guangdong.

Seven undergraduate students at Peking University (Beida) and Renmin University (Renda) were detained in a coordinated operation on Jan. 21.

All were Maoist activists who had shown support for the labor movement at a factory owned by Jasic Technology in Guangdong's Shenzhen city.

Some were paid-up members of Marxist associations at their universities.

A video of Beida student Zhang Ziwei providing an eyewitness account was found on his cell phone under a bed after he was himself detained.

"I'm Zhang Ziwei," the recording says. "Six of my classmates have been detained already today, two of them just downstairs from where we live."

"They were shoved into a car, shouting 'call the police!'" Zhang says, adding that he too is a target.

"Dark forces are conducting house-to-house searches right now," he says. "They want to take me away too, just like they did to the others."

Zhang's fellow Beida students Li Ziyi, Ma Shize, Sun Jiayan were also detained, along with recent Beida graduates Li Jiahao and Huang Yu.

Renda student Yan Zihao was also detained.

Rights activists said the students were taken into custody after they hit out publicly at "confession" videos of previously detained members of the Maoist Jasic Workers' Solidarity Group (JWSG) shown to supporters protesting their ouster from the Beida Marxism society earlier this month.

Jasic detentions

Activists have called for the release of more than 30 former workers at a factory in neighboring Guangdong province and JWSG members, who were supporting them.

Dozens more students and recent graduates of China's top universities have been "disappeared" or criminally detained since the nationwide crackdown on the Jasic labor movement made further waves of arrests and detentions in August, September and November, the JWSG reported on its Github page.

Among them are Sun Yat-sen University graduate and Jasic movement spokeswoman Shen Mengyu and Peking University #MeToo campaigner Yue Xin.

Yue, Shen, Zheng Yongming and Gu Jiayue "confessed" in the videos to trying to "overthrow" the ruling Chinese Communist Party by working with foreign media organizations to spread "false information."

Yue also criticized her attempts, inspired by the global #MeToo movement, to force Beida to reveal information about a decades-old rape case that led to a student suicide, saying she had been exploited by "foreign forces."

Gu and Zheng are in a form of detention known as "residential surveillance at a designated location," which enables them to be held incommunicado for up to six months with no access to lawyers.

Video 'confessions'

From 2013-2018, China aired nearly 50 video "confessions," which rights groups say are always made under duress, and likely indicate physical or mental torture.

Chen Chuangchuang of the U.S. Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars, who has been following the Jasic crackdown closely, said the students had reacted in anger at being shown the videos.

"When they had watched those videos, they uploaded them to the internet and then they gave a string of interviews to the foreign media about them," Chen told RFA. "They said they wouldn't back down."

"Shortly after that, those same students were detained," he said.

The JSWG said on its Github page that the appearance of two students—Gu Jiayue and Shen Mengyu—in particular gave cause for concern.

"The most striking part of these videos are the images of Gu Jiayue and Shen Mengyu, who are pale, with dark circles under their eyes," the group said in a Jan. 17 statement. "Their eyes are dull and their speech unclear."

"When they make their confession statement, they sound as if they are reading from a script," it said. "They pause often and blink a lot, as if they can't remember what they were going to say next; as if they had to try hard to remember."

It said the police attempt to blame external forces was an attempt to avoid conflict in Chinese society.

Reported by Wang Yun for RFA's Mandarin Service. Translated and edited by Luissetta Mudie.



Former members of the Beida Marxism society hold up placards on Peking University campus in Beijing, in protest at the 'reorganization' of their group, Jan. 25, 2019.

Photo provided by an RFA listener

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