

University of Hong Kong labour researcher Fang Ran detained by police in China during studies, friends say

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One of the friends said Fang Ran was passionate about social issues and was “not afraid of speaking out whenever he sees some injustice.”

A researcher from the University of Hong Kong has been detained by police in China, friends said Wednesday, while studying the politically thorny issue of workers’ rights. Beijing has repeatedly cracked down on grassroots protests and labour NGOs in recent years, with authorities seeking to control social movements they view as a potential challenge to the state.

Fang Ran, a sociology PhD student researching labour movements in China, has not been seen for five days, friends told AFP.

A message circulated on social media, apparently from his father, said his son was detained by police in the city of Nanning in southwestern Guangxi region last Thursday.

“I am extremely shocked at this,” wrote Fang’s father, describing his son as a loyal member of the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

“In my view, Fang Ran is definitely not a criminal who seeks to harm the Party, but an ambitious young person who is helpful to the Party’s cause.”

AFP could not independently verify the message, but three friends of Fang confirmed the content.

Hong Kong University said in a statement that it is *“aware of the matter and actively looking into it”*. *“We will provide assistance to Mr Fang and his family where appropriate,”* a university spokesperson told AFP.

In the message his father wrote that the 26-year-old had been put into a form of solitary secret detention known as *“residential surveillance at a designated location”*, which is often used against dissidents.

Friends say that Fang, a Chinese national, had been researching labour conditions in Chinese factories in the southern manufacturing hub of Shenzhen, where he lived for the past six months. One of the friends told AFP Fang was passionate about social issues and was *“not afraid of speaking out whenever he sees some injustice.”*

Numerous student labour activists were detained in 2018 and 2019 as part of a nationwide crackdown on campus Marxist groups, many of whom helped organise factory worker unions in southern China.

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article59452>

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<https://scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3147208/phd-student-researching-chinese-labour-movements-detained>

<https://www.dimsumdaily.hk/hong-kong-university-phd-student-fang-ran-detained-in-china/>

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<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/researcher-labor-09022021090037.html>

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<https://hongkongfp.com/2021/09/01/university-of-hong-kong-labour-researcher-detained-by-police-in-china-during-studies-friends-say/>