

China: Massive online resistance to the covering up of the case of the Xuzhou chained woman

Tuesday 1 March 2022, by [AU Loong-yu](#) (Date first published: 1 March 2022).

Au Loong-yu writes about the case of the Xuzhou chained woman and finds the crime says just as much about the system as the perpetrator. Both are guilty.

A video about a chained woman on 27 January in Feng County, Xuzhou, Jiangsu, went viral over the internet, and then in three weeks the number of hits on the online subject of “Xuzhou chained woman” reached billions. [1] The government censorship responded by deleting most of these posts, but the spontaneous and collective effort of Chinese netizens had obtained enough time to expose the real story of this woman who had been kidnapped, raped and downtrodden for more than two decades, a woman who allegedly had her teeth knocked out because of resisting her rapists. Any responsible local government would have taken the claim seriously and started to investigate. The netizens, seeing this was not occurring, took the initiative to carry out an online investigation which was complemented by physical on-site inspection by brave civil reporters, including two ladies who were temporarily detained. This forced the local government to change its story four times until the provincial government announced the founding of an investigation team, which eventually led to the punishment of 17 Feng County officials on 23rd February. This was not received with much relief among netizens however as this investigation did not sound credible to them, not to mention the fact that the local government now quietly blocked all entrances to the village by non-residents, silencing online discussion and more importantly the chained woman was not to be seen again.

Until today we cannot be sure of the real name of this woman. The local government first claimed that she was called Yang, and after the “online Sherlock Holmes” (as the online investigators were nicknamed) exposed this as a lie, it was forced to revise the claim by saying that she was called Xiaohuamei instead. The “online Sherlock Holmes” not only exposed this as another lie, but also raised the possibility that she might have been a missing girl called Li Ying from Sichuan. The investigation was far from being able to find out all the truth, but was enough to show the collusion between the “clients” (the “husband” of the woman), the mafia and the local officials in this horrible industry called human trafficking, with women and children as its main victims.

The “client” in this case is called Dong Zhimin, who “married” the chained woman in 1998 and, according to the official record, the “marriage” had led to the birth of eight children. The first official version of the poor woman’s identity is nothing but a proof of local government officials’ collusion with Dong. How could he have had eight children while the one child policy was in place, and been so privileged as not only to be able to avoid any punishment but to enjoy welfare for his children? How could the “couple” get married with fake identities, and get away with this for more than two decades while the mother of the missing girl was looking for her child, and when one of the most severe social control systems in the world was in place (from the old household registration system to a tracking system enhanced by the communication revolution and AI measures such as facial recognition techniques)?

Ten years back, the Hong Kong scholar Alvin So wrote a book which partly dealt with the collusion between mafia and local governments:

The Mafia is involved because the corrupted local authorities need them to snatch the peasant's land. Kathy Walker (2006) used the term "gangster capitalism" to describe the plundering of public wealth by power-holders and their (h)angers-on and He Qinglian (2006, p.93) reported that "local governments throughout China have used criminal organisations as goon squads to force urban residents from their homes and seize farmers' land". " [2]

The Xuzhou chained woman is just one of the hundreds of thousands of cases of abduction of women. Apologists for Beijing may refer to these kinds of events as something confined to the local. This is only a half truth. The other half is related to the national policies of the CCP. Firstly it is related to the "one child policy". The phenomenon of infanticide of baby girls or of "missing women" - "who according to biological averages should have been born, have gone missing from the world", [3] is worldwide. The Chinese case has a special feature however. The one child policy, unique in the world, especially with regard to the grand scale of its implementation, greatly contributed to the selective abortion of females in the last three decades. This has resulted in the disproportionately low birth rate of baby girls, and grown up men now increasingly find it difficult to find a spouse, especially in rural China. Many people then resort to "buying" wives, which in turn promotes the mafia's industry of abducting young girls. But how this industry can flourish in an Orwellian society like China where state control over the population is comprehensive and gigantic is something that requires explanation. What Alvin So mentioned about the collusion of local authorities with criminal gangs also applied to human trafficking. Secondly, this is related to the core value of China's Orwellian state. These local authorities cannot cover up their crimes indefinitely if their power is somehow checked by local residents, or the nation's opposition parties, or an independent press, or autonomous trade unions or women organizations. It is here that the support of the party state is crucial - its zero tolerance of the freedom of the press, of dissidence, and of the autonomy of civil associations; all these features of the Orwellian state help to offer the best protection to local authorities which in turn are protecting the local mafia.

As to the Xuzhou case, even with such huge online support for the chained woman, she is still very far away from obtaining visible justice. If a sports celebrity like Peng Shuai, instead of getting justice, only found herself being silenced after she openly claimed the former premier had sexually assaulted her, the chance that a farm girl like the chained woman can get justice is slim. Still the overwhelming online and physical support for her is something impressive; it proves that the people can still make their voices heard from time to time, and force the authorities to change policies. On top of that there is also one possible and significant development. A commentator, Song Yang, concluded that:

Nowadays anger among the people has been rapidly developing, comparable only to the amount of energy accumulating before the eruption of volcanoes. This level of anger is rare in the past....Even those "little pinks" [4] are silent, and stop singing their praises (for the state). Further on, those friends who once had hope or illusion on the status quo are now also disillusioned, and think that the government is deceiving everyone. [5]

Au Loong-yu

P.S.

• Anti*Capitalistresistance. 01 Mar 2022:

<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/massive-online-resistance-to-the-covering-up-of-the-case-of-the-xu-zhou-chained-woman/>

Footnotes

[1] <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/gJq4YPNaoMZJfSX1DNHFbQ>

[2] *Class and Class Conflict in Post-Socialist China*, Alvin So, World Scientific Publishing Company, 2013, p. 148.

[3] *Estimates of Missing Women in Twentieth Century China*, Quanbao Jiang, Shuzhuo Li, Marcus W. Feldman, and Jesús Javier Sánchez-Barricarte,
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3830941/>

[4] It is a term used to describe young jingoistic Chinese nationalists on the internet. — Wikipedia

[5] <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/renquanfazhi/ql-02212022094203.html>