

# **“Human life means nothing (to them)”: Interview with a Chinese worker who fled Foxconn**

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**Stories of workers escaping from Foxconn’s Zhengzhou factory in China have been circulating on Chinese social media. Fearful of COVID-19 inflection and confined to the factory compound, some workers panicked and fled home. To bring forward a worker’s perspective on why and how they fled, we have translated a worker’s account of her experience.**

## **Editor’s Note:**

Stories and images of workers escaping and running away on feet from Foxconn’s Zhengzhou factory in China’s Henan province have been circulating on Chinese social media. The mega-factory employs over 200,000 workers, and is a major supplier of Apple and other electronics brands.

To keep them working and not disrupted by Covid-19, Foxconn has recently put workers under a closed-loop system, which has been used elsewhere including Tesla and Huawei, to maintain zero-infection inside the loop. Under this closed-loop system, workers can only go between their dormitories and the workshops, and are not allowed leave the factory compound without permission.

In recent weeks, however, workers at the Foxconn factory began to be tested positive. But according to workers, these workers are sometimes allowed to continue working. Fearful of being infected because of the proximity to each other in the workshops and distrustful of the company’s handling of the outbreak, workers panicked and many fled home. Finally, Foxconn was pressured to let workers leave, and local governments organised shuttle buses to take workers home.

We translated an interview with a woman worker from a Chinese-language WeChat account. She explains why and how she fled. It has been edited lightly for length and clarity.

## **ALR Editors**

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### **A Foxconn woman worker**

My family is from the Yushi County, Kaifeng City in Henan (note: a central province in China where Foxconn and other manufacturers had relocated to from the coastal regions). I stopped studying before graduating from junior high school. I then started a family. My husband is unemployed. We

have two children. I was introduced to working at Foxconn in Zhengzhou (note: Zhengzhou is capital city of Henan).

Foxconn has two peak seasons every year, from February to May and from July to October (but sometimes from August to November). During these two peak seasons, Foxconn needs a large number of workers, and they pay a high bonus. That is, if an employee had been on the job for 90 days and clocked in for 55 days, they would receive a bonus of 8,000 - 10,000 yuan (USD\$1,095 - \$1,370).

In recent years, during every year to the peak season, I will choose to go to Foxconn. Foxconn's monthly base salary is 2,000 yuan (USD\$274), which calculated according to the 8-hour shift every day. In order to earn more money, we all work overtime desperately, and we can receive a salary of 3,500-4,000 yuan a month.

Although the base salary is not high, I am still very satisfied with the job because I can receive a high bonus when I are finished with my job. So I'm grateful to Foxconn for bringing stable incomes to rural families like us.

After the Covid-19 outbreak in Zhengzhou in October this year, as the virus spread, the whole Foxconn factory was in a state of panic. People who were tested positive were pulled away from every workshop every day, especially recently.

But what people don't understand is that although the pandemic can silence a city or a village (note: "silence" refers to the lockdowns and restrictions), Foxconn can continue to work normally, concentrating workers together and even having people who are tested positive mixed into the workshops to work.

It made everyone very scared and frightened. Workers were asking why they couldn't take two days off. But it was useless because they always put the quantity (of products) first and human life second. Human life means nothing (to them).

On October 29, I returned to the dormitory from the night shift and slept until 3:00 p.m. When my family called me, they woke me up and told me to hurry up and go back home. If I didn't go back now, I couldn't go back later. Workers' social media groups also exploded with discussion. Everyone was discussing how to escape.

I got up and hurriedly packed up. With no time to eat, I stuffed the two loaves of bread given by the factory into my red shoulder bag, flew downstairs, bought a bag of instant noodles, a box of yogurt, a bottle of water and a bag of ham sausage at the kiosk, and looked around in a panic for an exit.

The Foxconn factory compound is too large, all around with iron welded. Without permission, people outside can not enter, and the people inside cannot get out. I climbed on the railing and jumped over, and looked for more than an hour in vain for an exit that other workers mentioned.

Finally, a kind-hearted man led me to the place where the wires had a big hole. He used his motorcycle light to illuminate for me and said: run, run.

After I sneaked out, there were already a lot of people outside. I was wearing a pair of white sneakers, a pair of dark blue jeans, and a black fall coat. I was worried about being cold at night and brought an extra down jacket with me when I came out.

I couldn't use navigation and didn't know the direction of home, so I had to ask if there were people going to my hometown. At 7:00 p.m., I followed four or five people and set off in the direction of

home. Along the way, I met many people who had escaped, and everyone's goal was to return home.

Because of the fear of bringing trouble to the people in the villages along the way from the infected area, we all walked along the highway, sometimes through the crop fields, and tried our best to choose the sparsely populated places to go.

Before escaping, I was worried that I would be hungry on the road. I did not expect that there would be so many kind people along the way to prepare food and drink for us.

I became really tired from the walk, and sat on the ground to rest. I did not dare to sleep, hoping to return home earlier and worrying about what may happen on the road.

Because I took rest, several times I couldn't catch up with other workers. Every time, I had to look for workers also going to my hometown. So all night long, I kept asking and kept running. The good thing is that a lot of people are going home, so every time I was able to find people (to follow); otherwise I will certainly get lost and couldn't get home.

We reached the epidemic prevention point in Yushi County at 6:00 a.m. the next day. I was so tired. I sat down and didn't want to get up. The staff registered us, and did the nucleic acid test. At about 9:00 am, I was put on a bus to our hometown.

Our bus had 40 people. There were many buses that kept transporting people to each town.

When we arrived at the township isolation site, we did three more nucleic acid tests. We had 6 people tested positive inside a bus of 40 people, and they were then taken away. I wasn't scared at all because I was used to it in the factory.

I was put in a room with another woman. The government provided beef noodle with bun. The smell of home was delicious. I fell asleep.

When I woke up today, I opened the "Love Pocket App" (note: an app created by Foxconn for its workers) on my phone and it showed that I was absent from work. I went to work at Foxconn in July, and my contract is due to expire on November 2. The contract says that if I missed work three days in a row, I would not be entitled to the bonus.

Some people asked me why I didn't stick around the factory for three more days before coming back (in order to get the bonus). I said I wanted my health, not money. Of course, I hope they can consider that this is a special case and give me the bonus.

I don't know how many more days I will stay in the isolation site, but I am happy that I managed to escape.

In a few days, I will be able to see my children and family.

As for Foxconn, I won't go again because I'm afraid.

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**P.S.**

• Asian Labour Review, November 1, 2022 1:49 am:

<https://labourreview.org/human-life-means-nothing-to-them/>

- Translated by ALR Editors.