

JUL/SEPT 2018

Vaccine Scandal Rocks China

Consumer scandals continue to engulf China. News broke out in late July that Changsheng Biotechnology Co. and Wuhan Institute of Biological Products Co. had respectively manufactured more than 250,000 and 400,000 substandard infant vaccines, an unknown number of which may have been administered to Chinese toddlers. This revelation sparked outrage across Chinese society. Social media platforms were inundated with criticism of unscrupulous corporate conduct and lax government supervision. On 30 and 31 July, furious parents even staged a protest in Beijing outside the offices of the National Health Commission and National State Drug Administration. Such massive public backlash was not only due to the fact that defective vaccines would fail to protect infants from common diseases—such as diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus—but also due to the revelation that government officials had covered up for Changsheng Bio-technology Co. when it was discovered that the company had been falsifying its production data in October 2017. In response to the public outcry, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang vowed to conduct a thorough investigation. Fines have since been enforced on the two corporations involved, their executives detained, and more than 40 government officials punished. These efforts may, however, do little to restore Chinese consumer confidence in domestic products, as this is just the latest in a series of repeated scandals since the milk powder incident in 2008. *NLiu*

(Sources: **Bloomberg; Caixin; CNN; Ershiyi Shiji Jingji Baodao; SCMP; Wall Street Journal**)

Xinjiang Garner Global Attention

Since October 2017, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region has been marked by intensified surveillance of Uyghurs, a Muslim ethnic minority (see the Forum in the present issue of *Made in China*). According to scholar Rian Thum, an ‘entire culture is being criminalised’, as reports have emerged that up to one million Uyghurs have been detained in political re-education camps. Prominent Uyghur figures, such as Professor Rahile Dawut, football star Erfan Hezim, and musician Abdurehim Heyit are all believed to be currently held in such camps. Until recently, this has been met with silence from the international community. However, in August the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination released a report expressing concern, and called for the immediate release of all wrongfully and unlawfully detained individuals, as well as for the end of ethno-religious profiling. Likewise, in September, Human Rights Watch—an NGO based in the United States—released an extensive report detailing and providing evidence about the Chinese government’s mass internment camps; abuse and mistreatment of ethnic Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other minorities; as well as the increasingly intrusive controls on everyday life in Xinjiang. Government leaders in Muslim countries—in particular Malaysia and Pakistan—have also expressed concern. Meanwhile, the Chinese government has continued to deny all allegations, and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has discredited the reports as ‘one-sided information’, claiming instead that the Autonomous Region is currently ‘enjoying overall social stability, sound economic development, and harmonious coexistence of different ethnic groups’. The Ministry further stated that the ‘policies and measures in Xinjiang are aimed at preserving stability, promoting development and unity, and improving livelihood.’ *TS*

(Sources: **CNN; Human Rights Watch; Radio Free Asia 1; Radio Free Asia 2; Reuters; SupChina; The Economist; The Independent; The New York Times 1; The New York Times 2**)

#MeToo Lands in China

In spite of almost immediate censorship from the Chinese government, China's nascent #MeToo movement has refused to be stifled. During the summer of 2018, the movement—predominantly led by student activists—resonated across university campuses in China. Online, the #MeToo hashtag has since collected over 4.5 million hits on Weibo, with activists sidestepping online censors through the use of homophones, including #MiTu, which roughly translates to #RiceBunny. #MeToo in China has led to accusations against multiple high-profile men in the realms of academia, media, and civil society, including activist Lei Chuang, environmentalist Feng Yongfeng, and journalists Zhang Wen and Xiong Peiyun. Recently, accusations against two other well-known men have emerged—Buddhist Master Xuecheng and billionaire Richard Qiangdong Liu, founder and CEO of JD.com. On 15 August, Xuecheng resigned from his tenure as head of China's government-run Buddhist Association after being accused of sexual assault and harassment. A 95-page dossier, compiled by two supervisory chancellors at Beijing's Longquan Temple, contains several reports of Xuecheng sending sexually aggressive texts to nuns and disciples, with one woman accusing him of rape. Liu was arrested on 31 August following allegations of rape from a Chinese student at the University of Minnesota. If found guilty, Liu faces up to 30 years in prison. Although the movement so far has stopped short of attacking any powerful figure in the Party-state apparatus, the downfall of such high-profile and influential individuals has been well-received as victories for China's #MeToo movement. *TS*

(Sources: **Chublic Opinion; Reuters 1; Reuters 2; SBS; South China Morning Post 1; South China Morning Post 2; The Atlantic; The Wall Street Journal; The Washington Post 1; The Washington Post 2**)

One Step Forward, Ten Steps Back for Human Rights

This past quarter has seen the continued repression of human rights in China. However, there was some welcome news on 9 July, when Liu Xia—widow of late Chinese Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo—was released from effective house arrest and moved to Germany. Sadly, 9 July also marked the third anniversary of the '709' crackdown, which saw the arrest of over 300 human rights lawyers and activists. On the anniversary, the European Union urged the Chinese government to release almost 30 detained activists, including publisher Gui Minhai (a Swedish citizen) and lawyer Wang Quanzhang. At the same time, in Hong Kong a group of lawyers and activists held a silent protest outside the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal. In response, the Party-state stepped up repression. On 11 July, Qin Yongmin, a veteran pro-democracy campaigner, was sentenced to 13 years in prison on charges of 'subversion of a state power'. On the same day, Mongolian historian and author Lhamjab A. Borjigin was detained following charges of ethnic separatist activities. These charges are reportedly related to his book, documenting the life of ethnic Mongolians during the Cultural Revolution, wherein Borjigin claims that at least 27,900 Mongolians died, and 346,000 were imprisoned and tortured. A few days later independent liberal think tank Unirule Institute of Economics—which has often taken a critical stance toward government policies—was evicted from their Beijing office following an apparent tenancy dispute. Likewise, Jianjiao Bulao (roughly translated 'Pepper Tribe'), an online platform where female factory workers 'screamed' about workplace issues, was also shut down in July. In a similar incident, 84-year-old physics professor, Sun Wenguang, a vocal critic of China's human rights record, was forced off-air while he was giving a live interview with Voice of America and his whereabouts has been unknown since then. *TS*

(Sources: **Hong Kong Free Press; Quartz; Radio Free Asia 1; Radio Free Asia 2; Reuters 1; Reuters 2; South China Morning Post 1; South China Morning Post 2; Voice of America News**)

Jasic Strike Paves the Way for Yet Another Crackdown on Labour NGOs

On 24 July, a group of workers at Shenzhen Jasic Technology, were beaten up by security guards and arrested by police while protesting against their illegal dismissal. Back in May they had reported the company to the local authorities for illegally manipulating work schedules, using a punitive system of fines, underpaying social insurance and housing funds, and blacklisting employees. The local branch of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) had, at that time, suggested that workers organise a factory-level union. This prompted the workers to gather 89 signatures out of a labour force of 1,000 for the union membership application (see Zhang Yueran's op-ed in this issue). Instead of heeding their call, management proceeded to create its own 'worker representatives committee', which excluded candidates nominated by the workers. The local authorities and the ACFTU withdrew their original support for the workers' union and claimed that the unionising was illegal. In the wake of the arrests, the protest gained solidarity not only from fellow workers elsewhere, but also from Maoist student-activists. As the protest grew, on 24 August the government cracked down on workers and the solidarity group, detaining dozens and subsequently charging a number of individuals. On the same day, state media published articles accusing Dagongzhe Zhongxin, a Shenzhen-based labour NGO, of instigating Jasic workers at the behest of 'hostile foreign forces' based in Hong Kong. Almost three years after the crackdown of December 2015, once again the Party-state is exploiting a specific case to target labour NGOs as a whole. Nevertheless, the explicit demand for unionisation, the open defiance against management and police assaults, and an emerging student-worker alliance distinguishes the Jasic case, making it a surprising development in a period of downturn for China's labour movement. *KL*

(Sources: **China Labour Bulletin; Red Balloon Solidarity; Reuters; South China Morning Post; Weiquanwang; Xinhua**)

Shenzhen Urban Redevelopment Pushes Migrants to the Fringes

On 11 June, Foxconn employees posted an open letter at the company's facility in Longhua, Shenzhen, to express their discontent with the redevelopment of surrounding urban villages. They alleged that this redevelopment would double or even triple rents, making housing completely unaffordable for them. Residents of Shenzhen's urban villages—mostly migrant workers—have recently been notified by their landlords that they will have to move out upon the expiry of their current contracts. This comes in the wake of the latest urban upgrade in Shenzhen. In November 2017, the Shenzhen government proposed an action plan for upgrading urban villages from 2018 to 2020. The city currently has 1,044 urban villages, with a total of more than 10 million residents. The proposal calls for the transformation of urban villages into 'clean, orderly, harmonious, safe, and happy homes' by July 2020. Migrant workers decide to live in urban villages mostly for the low rent. However, according to a study carried out by Hong Kong University, the average rent has gone up from 550 yuan per person per month in 2015 to 700 yuan in 2017. Rather than evicting residents outright, real estate companies have been enlisted to redevelop urban villages into commercial housing. Companies either renovate and rent out existing buildings at higher prices, or demolish and build new apartment complexes. While it is not the same coercive eviction of migrant workers that took place in Beijing in late 2017, the redevelopment is likely to push many migrants, who in recent years have seen stagnating wages, to the fringes of the city. *KL*

(Sources: **Nanfang Zhoumo; NetEase; The Guardian; Yicai**)