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International Master's Program in Asia-Pacific Studies,
College of Social Sciences, National Chengchi University

碩士論文

Master's Thesis

電視審判:為何中共讓嫌疑犯在電視招供?

**Trial by TV: Why is China broadcasting televised
confessions of suspects?**

學生: 黛娜 Student: Dinah Gardner

導師: 王韻教授 Advisor: Prof. Yun Wang

中華民國106年07月


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Almost 300 years ago, the third Qing emperor, Yongzheng, makes a remarkable response to a treason case. Once a confession has been tortured out of the traitor, a countryside scholar called Zeng Jing, Yongzheng does not order his execution by slicing as would normally be called for, instead he is obsessed with getting him to admit he was wrong to call for the overthrow of the “Manchu barbarians” and sets about converting him into a “mouthpiece of the throne.” After being given extensive reading material to convince him in jail, Zeng Jing duly expresses remorse and becomes an avid supporter of Qing rule. Mission accomplished, Yongzheng makes their letters, Zeng Jing’s confession and a written account of his change of heart into a book, which he titles “Awakening from Delusion.” This tome is circulated across the country, right down to village level and all students are ordered to study it; public discussion sessions on its contents are mandated. Months later Zeng Jing is freed. Yongzheng appears to have been motivated by a desire to stamp out anti-Qing sentiment from the conquered Han. Convinced that executing Zeng Jing would not prevent an eventual plot to overthrow him, he believes he has to change people’s minds; he has to persuade his subjects that the Qing are the rightful rulers of China. Yongzheng uses Zeng Jing to legitimize Qing rule .

This project of Yongzheng’s has surprising parallels to the topic of this thesis – nationally televised confessions of suspects in the People’s Republic of China 2013-2016. Back in the 18th century there were no televisions, but Yongzheng made sure that a copy of “Awakening from Delusion” was read or read aloud to those who were illiterate across the nation. Just like Zeng Jing, the subjects of the televised confessions do not merely confess, they also express their remorse and outline the error of their ways. And just like Zeng Jing’s, this thesis argues, their confession is about legitimizing the Party’s rule.

Three hundred years have passed, the dynasty has fallen, and revolutions have been won and lost, but echoes of the past continue to sound today.¹

¹ The story of Emperor Yongzheng and traitor Zeng Jing is the subject of Jonathan Spence’s 2001 book *Treason by the Book*.



Image circulating on Chinese instant messaging app WeChat, seen by the author in May 2017. The image, dated 26 November 2016, illustrates how activists and dissidents in China are using humour to deal with televised confessions. The text in Chinese reads: “Today is Lu Xun’s 135th birthday. My online friend said if Lu Xun was alive today, he’d look like this.” The face of Lu Xun, a famous Chinese writer during the Nationalist period, is superimposed over a screenshot of journalist Chen Yongzhou filmed giving a TV confession in 2013.

Abstract

This study asks why China started broadcasting confessions of suspects on national television in 2013, just months after the accession of President Xi Jinping, and despite the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) repeated promises to improve the country's rule of law. The broadcasts have triggered widespread condemnation overseas, and to a lesser extent at home, for being illegal, another example of state repression, and resembling the unjust public struggle sessions of the Mao era. This thesis attempts to fill a gap in scholarship and provide the first systematic study of this new and understudied human rights violation. Interviews conducted with those who had confessed on television revealed that many are "show" confessions, where the suspect is made to memorise "lines," get in "costume," and "act" in front of the camera, indicating that they are "produced" for a specific purpose. In addition, an analysis of 90 confessions aired between 2013 and 2016 revealed that deliberate efforts were made to shame the confessor, emphasize their guilt, and use the words of their confession to incriminate and denigrate others, promote support for the CCP and its actions and respond to outside criticism. Borrowing François Bourricaud's (1987) concept of legitimacy as a dynamic process of legitimation, China's new televised confessions can be seen as much more than simply another tool of repression, rather they are acts of forced theatre aimed at furthering CCP legitimacy.

Keywords: televised confessions, Chinese human rights, forced confessions, repression, legitimacy, legitimation

摘要

本論文將研究在 2013 年習近平主席上任不到幾個月以來，並在中國共產黨不斷承諾要改善國家法治的情況下，中國為何在國家電視台上開始播出犯罪嫌疑人的電視認罪。這些電視認罪的播出引起了來自海外的廣泛譴責，從某種程度上在國內也受到了批評，因為電視認罪的播出被視為國家非法壓迫人的手段，並被認為是在重演當年毛澤東時代不公正的批判鬥爭行為。本論文是第一項對這種新侵權行為的系統研究，並試圖填補該研究領域的空白。本作者通過採訪在電視上曾經認罪過的人發現許多電視認罪是有“表演”色彩，往往犯罪嫌疑人被迫“背台詞”、穿著特定的服裝、在攝像頭面前“演戲”等。這表明國家在利用電視認罪來達到某種特定的目的。作者對 90 個 2013 年至 2016 年之間播出的電視認罪進行了分析並發現認罪者當局故意讓嫌疑人感到恥辱來強調他們有罪，使用嫌疑人認罪時所使用的話來牽連他人或貶低他人，以支持中共的這種行為並對於來自國外批評的聲音做出回應。本論文借用 François Bourricaud（1987 年）對合法性的概念作為一種活躍的合法化進程以表明中國新的電視認罪行為不只是簡單的進行壓迫的工具，而更多是一種強制性推動共產黨合法性的戲劇表演。

關鍵字: 電視認罪, 中國人權, 逼供, 鎮壓, 合法性, 合法化

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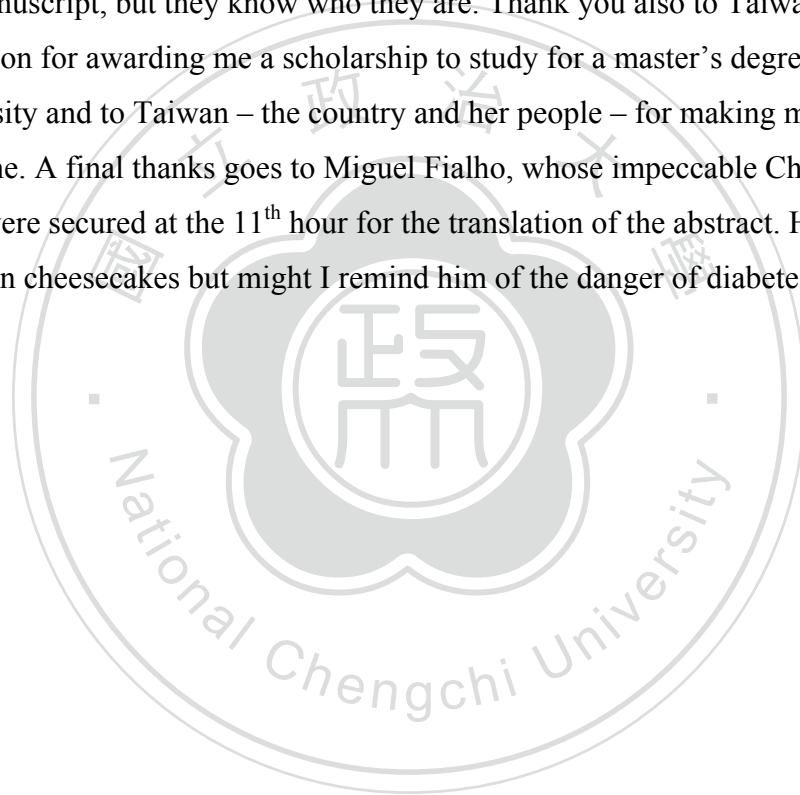


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Chapter 1: China's new televised confessions

China broadcast its first high-profile televised confession in July 2013 when Liang Hong, a GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) senior executive in China, appeared on state-run CCTV admitting to bribery.² By August 2016, at least 75 different suspects had confessed on air; in the majority of cases the subject confessed before any formal arrest had been made, prompting some to label these as “trial by media.” Many are connected with politically sensitive issues and include Chinese nationals, ethnic minorities, overseas Chinese with dual nationality, Hong Kongers, and foreigners (including Taiwanese). In 2016, the medium of broadcast extended to include Hong Kong-based media, *Phoenix TV* and *Oriental Daily* and mainland state-funded online newspaper, *The Paper* (澎湃). Some of the confession broadcasts appear to be a reaction to specific criticisms levelled at the Chinese authorities from overseas and in one case, at home. Furthermore, at least six of those who confessed on TV have claimed that the confession was coerced and untrue.

This study asks why China started broadcasting confessions of political suspects on national television in 2013 despite the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) repeated promises and efforts to improve the country's rule of law.³ The broadcasts have triggered widespread condemnation overseas and to a lesser extent at home from legal professionals for being illegal, another tool of state repression and for resembling the injustices of Mao-era struggle sessions. China has acknowledged that forced confessions are a problem within its police departments and has vowed to stamp out the practice. Why then has China chosen to televise these confessions, which are problematic on so many levels, to a potential audience of 1.4 billion people?

CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping (习近平) has underscored the role of state

² Moore, M. (2013, July 16). GSK executive confesses to bribery on Chinese television. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/pharmaceuticalsandchemicals/10181586/GSK-executive-confesses-to-bribery-on-Chinese-television.html>

³ As one example, the stated focus of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, held in October 2014, was on improving the rule of law. Please see: Communiqué of the 4th Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of CPC (2014, December 2), *China.org.cn*. Retrieved from http://www.china.org.cn/china/fourth_plenary_session/2014-12/02/content_34208801.htm

media as the Party's mouthpiece (including that of national broadcaster CCTV).⁴ Since state media were the main vehicle for these confessions (a small number were broadcast by CCP-friendly media) we can assume that these confessions result from a cooperation between the Security Bureau and the Propaganda Bureau. Essentially, the media is given access to suspects without the supervision of lawyers, sometimes before formal charges have been laid, and certainly before any kind of court case has taken place.

'Show' confessions as a tool of legitimacy building

While this study is designed to answer questions about *how* China is making these televised confessions, understanding *how* provides information on *why* China is broadcasting them. The televised confessions appear to be about much more than simply state repression. Just as Qing emperor Yongzheng used the mass publication of his communications with traitor Zeng Jing in the book, *Awakening from Delusion*, to persuade the majority Han people of the legitimacy of the Manchu's right to rule over them, this thesis argues that China's new televised confessions are acts of forced theatre aimed at strengthening the Party's right to rule China, in other words, the underlying purpose of the confessions is to support CCP legitimacy. This thesis defines legitimacy as a dynamic process of legitimation and not the state of being legitimate (Bourricaud, 1987); it is concerned with intentions and actions, not the outcome. As a process its aim is to create, foster and maintain the support of society for its continued rule, and that includes both attempts to legitimize itself and to delegitimize others that it deems are infringing on its right to rule. And while it is important not to draw too many parallels between Yongzheng and the CCP, here they both share the practice of using *the words of detainees or prisoners* to justify their rule and in that sense they are both concerned with legitimacy.

The interviews in this thesis provide strong evidence that most if not all of these televised confessions are "show" confessions where suspects are asked to memorise "lines," get dressed up, and "play" the role of a "confessor" in front of the camera.

⁴ See, for example, State media should play due role in properly guiding public opinion (2016, February 22), *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2016-02/22/content_23580181.htm and Xi Jinping asks for 'absolute loyalty' from Chinese state media (2016, February 19), *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/19/xi-jinping-tours-chinas-top-state-media-outlets-to-boost-loyalty>

Because these include cases from across the country and are broadcast on national television it can be deduced that such manipulation in terms of their “production” is evidence that the state is using them for a specific purpose.

The analysis of the broadcast data showed there were four main types of confession – Intimidation, Smear, Propaganda, and Guilt. All are compatible with furthering Party legitimacy and the repression of its perceived enemies. Intimidation confessions appear to be aimed at deliberately shaming the suspect (repression); Guilt confessions appear to be aimed at convincing the public that the authorities are punishing the “bad guys” and not protecting them (legitimation); Smear confessions appear to be a blunt instrument aimed at destroying the support of wider society for the target (delegitimation); and Propaganda confessions are aimed at promoting support for the state and its actions, such as a crackdown or a new regulation (legitimation). A sub-type, the Denial confession, which made up almost one quarter of all confessions, directly addressed criticisms or accusations levelled at China – for example the uproar over the alleged kidnappings of the Hong Kong booksellers and these can be read as an attempt to legitimize its rule to overseas observers through a show of power. In particular, the Smear confessions align with Pil’s (2016) and Lu’s (2016) view that many of these televised confessions are part of a wider strategy by the CCP to politicize and openly criminalize rights activism. The act of politicization and criminalizing rights activism is an effort to delegitimize the movement, and thus legitimize its own rule.

The CCP is not afraid of a few hundred human rights lawyers – by themselves they are merely troublesome – however, what does concern the top leadership is the possibility of a unified and wider call by Chinese society for the values activists and lawyers espouse (that is human rights, free speech, civil society, democracy, and universal values, etc).⁵ So while a subset of these confessions are clearly aimed at repressing these groups of people (the Intimidation confessions in particular), repression alone cannot explain all of the broadcasts because not everyone who confessed on air was involved in activism; for example, there were also businessmen, celebrities and murderers. These televised confessions have a bigger role to play

⁵ 225m reasons for China’s leaders to worry (2016, July 9), *The Economist*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21701760-communist-party-tied-its-fortunes-mass-affluence-may-now-threaten-its-survival-225m>

precisely because they are televised; that is they are made public. The detention, harassment, arrest and imprisonment of activists has mostly been kept out of the public eye in post-reform China (it is generally only reported in overseas media and talked about in activist circles inside China); the decision to broadcast their confessions is clearly aimed at a *wider* audience and therefore it must have a *wider* purpose. And that *wider* purpose, this thesis argues, is legitimacy.

Major purposes of this research

This thesis attempts to fill the gap in scholarship on this new and understudied phenomenon and provide the first systematic study of this grave human rights violation. Commentary so far has been based on a few individual cases. This study attempts to provide a better understanding of this phenomenon by looking at all suspects, including those that attract less media attention because the suspect is not part of the activist community or a foreigner. This study has produced a rich data set including detailed confession transcripts and carefully-designed variables that describe China's televised confessions from 2013 to 2016.

The overwhelming reaction from academics, the media and human rights advocacy groups outside China is that these televised confessions are a new and chilling tool of repression used by the CCP to silence and shame its critics; they a direct contradiction of its promise for rule of law reform; and are an extra-judicial effort to smear and discredit perceived enemies.⁶ They have also been criticized inside China as unlawful because neither the police nor the media have the right to judge the guilt of a suspect.⁷ However, while these confessions grab international headlines, there has been very little scholarship on this phenomenon. This thesis was designed to explore *how* they are made to better understand *why* they are being made.

⁶ See, for example: Wong, E. (2016, January 21). China Uses Foreigners' Televised Confessions to Serve Its Own Ends. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/22/world/asia/china-confession-cctv.html?_r=0; Jiang, S. (2016, January 26). Trial by media? Confessions go prime time in China. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/26/asia/china-television-confessions/> and Boehler, P. (2014, May 8). Beijing detains, parades journalist Gao Yu on state TV for 'leaking state secrets'. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1507195/beijing-detains-parades-journalist-gao-yu-state-tv-leaking-state>

⁷ Chin, J. (2016, March 15). Chinese Judge Criticizes Televised Confessions. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2016/03/15/chinese-judge-criticizes-televised-confessions/>

This study also aims to improve knowledge on an issue related to China's human rights record⁸ that could be useful in advocacy work. These confessions resemble those of rogue regimes and terrorist groups.⁹ For example, there was an outcry in 2010 after Iranian state TV broadcast the confession of a woman, who had already been sentenced to be stoned to death for adultery, of plotting to kill her husband.¹⁰ These confessions are a worrying trend for a country like China that has the world's second biggest GDP and is a rising global influence and particularly since they come at a time when Beijing is ambitiously expanding the global reach of its state media.¹¹ It is important for the consumers of China's media exports to be aware if the content is complicit in human rights abuses.¹²

Confessions in China

While public confessions and self-criticisms were frequent sights during the Maoist years, post-reform China has largely discontinued the practice, so their re-emergence in 2013 on national television with high-profile suspects can be seen as a rather surprising move. They coincide with an increasingly illiberal, anti-foreign and repressive environment after a new generation of leadership, headed by Xi Jinping,

⁸ In Cohen, J. (2013, 25 July). Criminal Justice in China: From the Gang of Four to Bo Xilai. *Human Rights Watch*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/25/criminal-justice-china-gang-four-bo-xilai>, Chen wrote: "As a citizen's most important protection against a government's arbitrary exercise of power over his person, criminal justice is perhaps the most telling indication of a government's adherence to human rights standards."

⁹ See, for example: Detained American in North Korea Makes 'Public Confession' (2016, February 29), *VOA*. Retrieved from <http://www.voanews.com/a/detained-american-in-north-korea-makes-public-confession/3212414.html>, and McKirdy, E. (2016, January 5). New 'Jihadi John'? British-sounding militant features in new ISIS video. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/04/middleeast/isis-propaganda-video-briton/>

¹⁰ Iran TV airs 'confession' from woman facing stoning (2010, August 12), *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-10949629>

¹¹ Shih G. (2016, December 31). China state broadcaster rebrands in international push. *AP*. Retrieved from <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c8504edb9ae3432f8ec42c2e617fc6a8/china-state-broadcaster-rebrands-international-outlets>

¹² Many of the confessions were broadcast on CCTV4 (a Chinese-language overseas channel) and CCTV9 (another global channel that broadcasts in English and other languages and that is now rebranded as CGTN. The stories of the confessions are also carried in *China Daily*, which is distributed worldwide and has supplements in major English language newspapers such as *The Wall Street Journal* and the UK's *The Telegraph*.

assumed power in 2012. Some critics have noted the return of Maoist-style control could be directly related to CCP General Secretary Xi.¹³

China's legal system remains obsessed with confessions. Police routinely prioritise the extraction of a confession over collecting evidence because of resource constraints (He & He, 2013). Confessions in any country are a powerful tool in securing convictions, even when they are suspected of being coerced (Kassin & Sukel, 1997). China admits forced confessions are a serious problem within its criminal justice system (Belkin, 2013) and in recent years has said it is trying to fix the problem.¹⁴

Legal framework

In order to rationalize how China promotes the rule of law, yet routinely overrides this for politically sensitive cases; scholars have put forward a number of theories. Liu, Liang & Halliday (2014) argue that the legal system is split between populism and professionalism. Pils (2013) similarly describes a “state of norms” – a body of laws to govern fairly and legally -- and a “state of measures” – brought into play whenever the state wishes to override that. At the lower levels, Pils and Cohen (2010) argued there are two Chinas as regards criminal justice – one made up legal professionals who believe in improving the law, and another where the police –the security bureau is far more powerful than the courts in China (Wang and Minzner, 2015) – override the rules to achieve certain goals. This study adopts this idea of a dual system to explain why these apparently illegal confessions can be broadcast – they are part of the state of measures. This study takes the view they are a new phenomenon aimed at building CCP legitimacy which needs the state of measures to be implemented.

¹³ Campbell, C. (2016, October 6). Five ways China has become more repressive under president Xi Jinping. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4519160/china-xi-jinping-cecc-human-rights-rule-of-law/>

¹⁴ China tries again to stop confessions through torture (2016, October10), *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-rights-idUSKCN12A0A4>

Literature review

Existing views on televised confessions

The televised confessions have attracted little scholarship so far; likely because it's a relatively new phenomenon in post-reform China in its current form – that is of high-profile and/or politically-sensitive suspects. International media and human rights advocacy groups, however, have written a great deal about these cases because they have involved the detention of foreign nationals, alleged transnational kidnappings, and are a shocking new tactic that mirrors the repugnant practices of show trials and public self-criticism sessions of Maoist China. This commentary does provide important and informed insights on the worsening situation for human rights in China, but with no systematic analysis, diverging views and a focus largely on the high-profile political cases, it lacks a strong evidence-based argument to help activists and policy-makers who want to advocate for an end to this illegitimate practice.

The overwhelming consensus from scholars quoted in media¹⁵ and from rights advocacy groups¹⁶ is that many of these televised confessions are almost certainly extracted by force (and possibly by torture). They are a new and chilling tool of CCP repression aimed at silencing perceived enemies; they are illegitimate and against the country's stated rule of law reforms. Some describe them as a display of the Party's power; others argue they are used to discredit people or groups of people, who are often painted as immoral and/or anti-China. The suspect is often described as being “paraded” on TV. Commentators noted that some confessions use language common to Party propaganda, and argued this suggests they are scripted.

Fiskesjö (2016) sees them as serving four main purposes: to repress and intimidate what he calls “alternative voices”; to manage public opinion; to shape reality so it agrees with the CCP narrative; and as a show of the regime's power

¹⁵ See, for example, Beijing's Televised Confessions: A ChinaFile Conversation (2016, January 20), *ChinaFile*. Retrieved from <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/beijings-televised-confessions>

¹⁶ See Justice for Some, Notoriety for Others: Public Law Enforcement in China (2014, August 26), *Dui Hua Human Rights Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.duihuahrjournal.org/2014/08/justice-for-some-notoriety-for-others.html> and Amnesty International (2015).

(which he traces to the top levels of the Party and their hankering for a return to the Mao era when spectacles of strength were common). The black hoods and bars that feature in some of the footage are borrowed imagery to demonstrate the Party's power over the suspect. Interestingly, he suggests that confessors are chosen because of their "propaganda value" – that is they are the CCP's enemies rather than people who have genuinely broken the law. He also breaks down the typical features of televised confessions into a template: first, the suspect is disappeared, followed by a period of silence when friends and family are not informed; during this time, he argues, the suspect is interrogated and tortured without physical evidence (a type of "clean torture") while the police scramble together a case; the suspect is coerced into making a confession which is scripted and then broadcast. His work is the only in-depth account so far of these televised confessions, and provides a good overview. Initial interviews and preliminary research for this paper have found a number of televised confessions that do not fit Fiskesjö's template, many confess on screen fairly soon after they are first detained – some within a few days. This suggests the reality is more complex – that there are different *kinds* of televised confessions, and therefore different *reasons* for broadcasting them.

Chinese media scholar David Bandurski (2015) focuses on the historical continuities with Mao-era self-criticisms (檢討), which he writes were used as a "psychological tool of power", bending the suspect to the Party's will. Here the confessed crime itself is not important, but rather the ritual. Writing about earlier forced confessions that pre-date those televised, Pils (2013), who has conducted extensive research on China's human rights lawyers based on years of interviews, quotes one lawyer telling her he believed they were about showing "who was master" and entirely divorced from law and logic.

Although China has a long history of using confessions in legal cases – Connor (2000) cites Hulsewé as claiming they were employed as far back as the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) – Fiskesjö (2016) dismisses any imperial connection because the defining feature of these televised confessions is that they are a public spectacle, which was not the case under the rule of the emperors. Instead, he argues, they bear a closer resemblance to Mao's show trials (themselves copied from the Soviet Russian show trial). Here, the media is used to propagandize these as displays of the regime's power and the Party's monopoly on truth. The

spectacle was enhanced with symbols of shame – signs were hung around the victim, detailing his or her name and the alleged crimes. Much has also been written about thought reform and brainwashing sessions subjected to western prisoners of China in the 1950s (Lifton, 1963 and Biderman, 1957). Lifton describes how victims were videotaped making their confessions and how they were made to repeatedly rewrite confession scripts so that they bore little resemblance to reality; it was more about the performance and satisfying their interrogators and their superiors.

The recent historical connection is not lost on other scholars. Cohen (2016a and 2016c) also likens them to Stalin’s infamous show trials. Pei¹⁷ places the confessions as part of a return to a “fear-based rule” that hasn’t been seen since the Mao era. The connection with Mao-era violence is interesting and likely important but this study believes that the shock factor of that resemblance has distracted commentators from understanding their contemporary purpose. Post-reform China is a very different place, if too much is copied from the traumas of the past there is a danger for the CCP that the Chinese public may even end up sympathizing with the suspects. For this reason, care should be taken in overlaying the historical connection.

Pils (2016) labels the televised confessions of the human rights lawyers as another “fear technique” from a long list¹⁸ aimed at intimidating them into quitting activism. Under Xi, she argues, “rule by fear” has become more obvious and is conducted in a more open manner¹⁹ – it is becoming the “new normal” for rights activists. In this, Pils (2016) captures the crucial point about these confessions: their broadcast on national TV to potential 1.4 billion viewers means the CCP is now “advertising” its repression, it no longer hides or denies. Commenting on the televising of the trials of the Fengrui Law Firm rights lawyers in the summer of 2016, Lu (2016) also argues this “new normal” is an effort to publicize its attack on

¹⁷ Pei, M. (n.d.). China’s Rule of Fear. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/minxin-pei/china-rule-fear_b_9243774.html?utm_hp_ref=world =

¹⁸ Among others, they include: being followed, detention, violence, forced disappearance, torture and in extreme cases forced psychiatric detention.

¹⁹ Pils identifies a number of recent changes that normalise repressive techniques including in 2013 revised criminal procedure rules that legalised forced disappearances in cases involving suspected state security crimes and the 2015 National Security Law that defined the nation’s enemies as anti-Party.

activists and get the public to support it in this endeavour.²⁰

Blind activist lawyer Chen Guangcheng agrees. He sees them as propaganda aimed at encouraging the Chinese public to hate activists and dissidents.²¹ As such they are part of a long-running campaign – Dickson (2016) noted that the Chinese public is afraid of chaos and often see dissidents as troublemakers, something exploited by the CCP to manipulate public opinion and boost legitimacy. Chen also suggests they are a “divide and conquer” strategy – those who confess and betray their colleagues and friends on TV are seen as untrustworthy, and this weakens the community. Chen, who can draw on his own terrible experiences in detention, argues the suspects are very likely tortured, a sentiment echoed by rights lawyer in exile, Teng Biao, who has also experienced torture in detention.²²

Others describe them as acts of shame, something which plays into the spectacle of state power mentioned earlier. CCP critic and writer Murong Xuecun, sees these televised confessions as a form of humiliation: “Xi has made public shaming an exquisite Chinese art.”²³ Echoing his sentiments, Bandurski described the confession video of Wukan village chief Lin Zuluan as a “shame” that was “paraded before the public.”²⁴ Shame is clearly an important part of any confession, but it is difficult and subjective to measure.

Chinese freelance journalist Zhao Sile argues the confessions include four elements – economic (accepting funds from overseas, misusing donations), moral (sexual misconduct), anti-Party intentions, and repentance (often the lengthiest part).

²⁰ In 2017, this trend continued with China’s Supreme Court identifying its imprisonment of rights lawyers as one of its biggest accomplishments in 2016. See, Punishing rights lawyers a top achievement, says China (2017, March 12), *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/punishing-rights-lawyers-top-achievement-china-170312044612735.html>

²¹ Chen, G. (2016, August 5). How to understand China’s confession videos. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/how-to-understand-chinas-confession-videos/2016/08/05/1bc7a1a0-5a75-11e6-831d-0324760ca856_story.html?utm_term=.15978d05e305

²² 直播：电视认罪的后酷刑 (2016, December 20), *Mingjing News*. [Video File]. Retrieved from <http://www.mingjingnews.com/TV/video/v000012843>

²³ Murong, X. (2015, March 20). China’s tradition of shaming public thieves. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/21/opinion/murong-xuecun-chinas-tradition-of-public-shaming-thrives.html?_r=1&mtref=chinadigitaltimes.net&gwh=D3E1CBC59A1A0B7D2ABAB950C36C3FEA&gwt=pay&assetType=opinion

²⁴ Bandurski, D. (2016, September 16). Wukan, China: The ‘Civilised Village’ that rose up. *Hong Kong Free Press*. Retrieved from <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2016/09/16/wukan-china-the-civilised-village-that-rose-up/>

Only the moral element is sometimes missing.²⁵ Legal scholar Alvin Cheung argues they are a bid for “soft power” abroad.²⁶ This argument is problematic because even if we suppose this was the original motive back in 2013 when the broadcasts first started, the overwhelming negative coverage from the West would soon expose it as harming soft power rather than boosting it.

Outside China these televised confessions are universally condemned, but what is the dominant response from the domestic audience? While outside the scope of this study because of access and other practical reasons, answering this question is a crucial part of understanding these televised confessions and well worthy of a separate study. Both Cohen (2016b) and exiled Chinese journalist Chang Ping,²⁷ who compared them to “shame parades” – the now banned tactic of marching accused suspects through the streets – believe that the Chinese public view them with scepticism. Zhao adds that there is evidence that at least a portion of society see through these confessions, citing comments online. However, online commentary is not evidence of widespread public opinion, and should be treated with caution. Chen and Bandurski (2016b) argue that the switch to Hong Kong-based media in 2016 was an indication that the CCP was concerned that people did not trust state broadcaster, CCTV.²⁸ However, since then more confessions have been broadcast on CCTV,²⁹ indicating that it utilized non-sate media for other reasons.

Televised and forced confessions outside China

Televised confessions are associated with rogue regimes and totalitarian states, so with the lack of empirical studies on China’s new televised confessions, this

²⁵ Zhao, S. (2016, April 3). 趙思樂：官媒審判，折損了誰？ *The Initium*. Retrieved from <https://theinitium.com/article/20160403-opinion-zhaosile-media/>

²⁶ Beijing’s Televised Confessions: A ChinaFile Conversation (2016, January 20), *ChinaFile*. Retrieved from <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/beijings-televised-confessions>

²⁷ Chang, P. (2015, April 6). Chinese public starting to shun government 'shame parades'. *The South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1757608/chinese-public-starting-shun-government-shame-parades>

²⁸ However, Dickson (2016) notes that his surveys show that almost 75% of students get their news from CCTV and levels of trust in state media are high.

²⁹ See, for example Shepherd, C. (2017, March 2). China dismisses human rights activists’ torture claims as ‘fake news’. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-human-rights-activist-torture-claims-fake-news-jiang-tianyong-xie-yang-a7607166.html>

study looked at research on forced confessions outside China. The Iranian-born historian Ervand Abrahamian (1999) studied Iran's televised confessions of the 1980s and 1990s. In his study, in which he quoted and paraphrased at length from the many confessions aired in that period, he concluded that the Islamic Republic was using the televised confessions as a propaganda tool to legitimize its rule and to discredit enemies of the state. He argued they are most effective when the audience feels that their country is threatened and when they are unaware of the coerced nature of the confession. These two preconditions identified by Abrahamian are worth noting, because, as Dickson (2016) wrote, one of the ways the CCP shores up its legitimacy is by painting itself as the "defender of the nation's interests"; that is from enemies from overseas – indeed fear about the "other" lies at the very heart of nationalism, as opposed to a love of one's country or patriotism. Since several of the confessions referred to conspiring with anti-China forces, there is strong evidence that these broadcasts are being used as a tool of legitimacy, similar to the tapes in Iran. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine whether the Chinese audience is aware of the forced nature of these confessions, but as Kassin & Sukel (1997) noted, confessions are often believed even when they are suspected of being coerced. Confessions by suspects accused of political crimes in China's televised confessions resemble the aired confessions of more straightforward criminal cases (such as economic crimes and drug busts), which may help to boost their believability by association. One last interesting point to note is that Abrahamian writes the Iranian confessions "bear striking and eerie resemblance to recantations" in Maoist China in the 1950s and 1960s, bringing this study full circle.

Appleby, Hassel & Kassin (2011) used content analysis on 20 false confessions used in US courts. They coded 26 categories and used a mock jury to rate credibility. They found that confessions were more readily believed when they also included a motive, explanations of how the crime was committed and statements of emotion before and after the crime (including an apology).

Chapter outline

The following five chapters explore how and why China has been broadcasting these confessions. Chapter 2 describes the two approaches used in this thesis – a modified grounded theory study of the confession broadcasts covering factual, visual and confession script variables and interviews with people who have

confessed on television or who have knowledge about the practice. Chapter 3 explores the key findings from the study of the confession broadcasts including a closer look at the main types of confessions. The key themes found in the interviews are covered in Chapter 4, including shocking testimony that the televised confessions are for “show” where suspects are forced to memorise “lines” get in “costume” and “act” in front of the camera for retake after retake. These findings are combined and discussed in Chapter 5, while the final Chapter 6 ties everything together and concludes China’s new televised confessions are acts of forced theatre aimed at furthering Party legitimacy. It also offers some final thoughts about the importance of calling China out on affronts to human dignity –as these televised confessions undoubtedly are – especially following the repugnant state manipulation of the reporting of the death and funeral of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Liu Xiaobo.



Chapter 2: Research method and design

This qualitative study used two approaches: an exploration of the confession broadcast data to look for patterns and a typology; and, long-form, semi-structured interviews with people who have either first-hand experience of making a televised confession or specialized knowledge of China's legal system and human rights situation. In addition, three written testimonies were used to supplement the interview data.³⁰ A modified grounded theory approach was used on the broadcast data as way of understanding the televised confessions by looking at the “whole” rather than just a small number of the broadcasts. It is hoped that this more macro approach has provided a richer perspective.

Data from the broadcasts

A chronological database of the televised confessions was made by searching news reports in English (google.com) and simplified Chinese (baidu.cn). The broadcasts were then located on the website of the broadcaster (CCTV, regional Chinese TV, *The Paper*, and two Hong Kong media— *Oriental Daily* and *Phoenix TV*) and saved to a flash drive in case they were taken offline or moved. Each confession was transcribed into the original language (all except one were in Chinese or Uighur; transcriptions relied on subtitles provided on CCTV broadcasts). These were then translated into English.

News packages of the confessions could be broadcast on many channels. So, to reduce the time and complexity of data collection and analysis, for those confessions aired on state TV broadcaster CCTV – and this was the vast majority of confessions – detailed data was collected from four channels only. These were: *Xinwen Lianbo* (新闻联播; hereafter shortened to XWLB) the main national daily news broadcast in China, and mandated to be shown on multiple channels every day at 7pm and 9pm. It has the most viewers³¹ and therefore may offer the best insight

³⁰ One of these is Lam Wing-kee's testimony to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (Lam, 2017) while the other two are anonymized because the authors still live in mainland China.

³¹ *The Economist* magazine wrote in 2016 that: “*Xinwen Lianbo* still has more viewers than any other TV news on Earth;” please see No news is bad news (2016, February 4), *The Economist*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21690099-how-communist-party-creates-worlds-most-watched-tv-news-show-no-news-bad-news>

into the motivations behind the televised confessions; the English language news service of CCTV9 (now rebranded as CGTN), which is China's foreign language global channel – this may provide some insight into how China wants its overseas viewers to understand these televised confessions; the *Zhongguo Xinwen* (中国新闻) program of CCTV4, the Chinese-language overseas service (also broadcast inside China) – likewise this may provide some insight into how China wants the overseas Chinese community to understand these televised confessions; and, CCTV13, the national 24-hours news channel. CCTV13 has around a dozen programs that carry televised confessions. For this research, *Morning News* (朝天天下, *Chaotian Tianxia*) and broadcast everyday between 6am and 9am on CCTV13 and CCTV1) was chosen because initial research showed that the confessions were most likely to be shown on *Morning News*.

CCTV 13 or equivalent

Most of the analysis focused on confessions broadcast on what this study calls “CCTV13 or equivalent.” The majority were broadcast on CCTV13 *Morning News*. If *Morning News* did not carry the broadcast, CCTV13's *Oriental Horizon* (东方时空, *Dongfang Shikong*), *Live News* (新闻直播间, *Xinwen Zhibojian*,) or *24 Hours* (24小时, *24 Xiaoshi*) were used instead in that order. In a small number of cases, the confession was only aired on CCTV4 and because CCTV4 confessions were of similar length and content to CCTV13 it was decided it was better to include these rather than exclude them from the study. Five of the confessions appeared on non-national channels – two mainland channels – *Wenzhou TV* and online newsite *The Paper*, and two Hong Kong-based media, *Phoenix TV* and *Oriental Daily*. If multiple confessions were made on non-state TV, the *Phoenix TV* broadcast was used.

Three types of data were recorded from each broadcast – oral (coded from the translated confession transcript), visual (coded from what could be seen in the broadcast footage) and factual (details of the broadcast and case, such as name of suspect and outcome of case).

Deciding on the unit of analysis

In the pursuit of simplification, the unit of analysis was chosen to be a single confession event.³² A confession event was defined as a televised confession aired as part of a single news cycle and shown on at least one of the four selected national TV stations (XWLB, CCTV9, CCTV4 or CCTV13) or one of the four non-national media channels (*Wenzhou TV*, *The Paper*, *Oriental Daily* and *Phoenix TV*).

A single news cycle describes broadcasts aired on the same day or within several days of each other (that is, the confession is edited from the same news package). For example, *Morning News* occasionally broadcast the confession a day later than the other CCTV13 evening shows; presumably because as an early morning show, the news package was not ready by the time the show went on air that first day. Also, CCTV9 frequently broadcast confessions a day or more after the Chinese language channels, presumably because they needed time to translate it into English.

The format of a single confession event was most often made up of a single main confessor sometimes accompanied by one or more supporting confessors. In a minority of cases, there were two main confessors or no main confessors, only supporting confessors. For a detailed explanation of main and supporting confessors please see below.

Confessions were broadcast on multiple channels and multiple programs, and while they all appeared to source their material from the same footage they often packaged it in different ways. It was quite possible for *Morning News* to have one main confessor and two supporting confessors, but on the same day, XWLB would only feature the main confessor (XWLB as a half hour show with 15 minutes or so dedicated to the movements of the Standing Committee Politburo officials, had limited time for domestic news so their confessions tended to be shorter). CCTV13 and CCTV4 ran many confessions as part of special news coverage that could run for up to 30 minutes in length.

A single confession event is linked to two concepts – the same main confessor(s) and/or off-screen target *and* the footage as part of the same news cycle. In a minority of cases, the same main confessor appears in a different confession

³² Complexity was on many levels – for example, confessions could appear on multiple channels in different formats, have different numbers of confessors, confessors themselves were split between main and supporting – more than 100 confession videos were collected for this study.

event (usually these were broadcast some weeks or months apart). Since this is considered to be a different news cycle it is a different confession event. Sometimes the main confessor confesses to a different crime (for example Charles Xue (薛必群) first confesses to group sex, then in a later confession tape he admits to spreading rumours on his Weibo account) or gives different details about the same alleged crime (for example Shen Hao's (沈灝) two broadcasts in 2014).

Each confession event is given a unique reference with the format date-group-main confessor name, for example, 15.7.13-GSK-Liang Hong, is the confession event broadcast on 15 July 2013, that belongs to the GlaxoSmithKline case, and where there is one main confessor, Liang Hong (梁鴻). If the confession event has two main confessors, the reference follows the same format except the two surnames are used linked by a hyphen. For example, 22.8.13-Bloggers-Qin-Lier, is the confession event broadcast on 22 August 2013, that belongs to the Bloggers group, and has two main confessors – Qin Huohuo (秦火火) and Lier Chaisi (立二拆四). If the confession event has no main confessor then the reference follows the same format with the name replaced by an identifier for the supporting confessors that cannot be confused with a surname. For example, 26.9.14-Ilham Tohti-3 students, is the confession event broadcast on 26 September 2014, that belongs to the Ilham Tohti group (Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti is the off-screen target) and has three students as supporting confessors and no main confessors.

Data for all four channels on every confessor (both main and supporting) were collected and coded. However, for this study, in order to reduce complexity and focus on the goals of the research, only data for CCTV13 or equivalent was analysed in depth. Please see Appendices III, IV, V and VI for some of the key data collected in this study.

Main and supporting confessors

During the initial stages of data collection it was apparent there were two types of confessors. To reflect their apparent “roles,” this study has called them main confessors and supporting confessors – their functions can be compared to lead and supporting actors in a stage play. The main confessor was the obvious focus of the news report – their name may feature in the headline, their face may be made into a

“logo” for the news report, and they are most often identified in the first few seconds of the news item. There is usually no ambiguity in who is a main confessor. It is their “confession” that is the news story. Most of their confession script focuses on their alleged crime while also sometimes touching on their emotional response and/or motive. Supporting confessors tended to mainly inform on others’ crimes, and provide background material. Their identities are often obscured, for example their full name is not given, instead the title mou (某) is used after their surname to denote Mr or Ms. It is possible to be a main confessor in one confession event, and a supporting confessor in a separate confession event.³³

The political scale

International media were alerted to the new trend for televising confessions because the first major case involved an overseas company – British pharmaceutical giant, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), and the case was widely considered by commentators to be politically motivated. Other confessions involved suspects accused of political crimes, while others appeared to be more straightforward criminal cases. This study created a political scale with three levels: high, medium, and low, and where the boundaries were blurred. A political score of high was given to those cases where the alleged crime (either at the time of the confession or at trial) was political – that is terrorism, stealing of state secrets, state subversion, inciting state subversion, and separatism. A political score of medium was assigned to those cases where the alleged crime involved a violation of social order (creating a disturbance, defamation, obscenity, and picking quarrels and provoking troubles) as these are well-known to be employed to harass activists, journalists, and rights lawyers (Pils, 2015) or where media coverage widely described the case as politically motivated – the alleged crime is so widespread and is usually overlooked or given a light punishment that this case can be seen as specifically *targeting* an individual or a company – a case of selective prosecution (for example the GSK case and Shen Hao’s *21st Century Business Herald* news extortion case). A low political score was given to those cases that neither involved a political crime nor were reported as politically motivated, for example the

³³ Zhai Yanmin (翟岩民) appeared in a June 2015 confession event as a main confessor, and again in two confessions in July 2015 when he took supporting roles.

Church of the Almighty God case where Zhang Lidong (張立冬) was accused of beating a woman to death. Of course, to some extent, all cases can be considered politically motivated; a scale was used to express the idea of degree.

Coding of confessions

This study used a modified grounded theory approach to devise codes for the confessions. The confession videos were watched repeatedly – first while transcribing, then while translating and then read through several times to decide on what key elements were repeated. Those that were relevant to the key conclusions in the literature review and could be coded easily from the English translation – that is clear and explicit statements with no emotional or nuanced elements that would require an ability to determine native cultural content – were used. They explored the ideas these confessions are aimed at legitimizing the CCP, repressing regime critics through the use of public humiliation, spreading fear and mistrust by using their confessions to implicate their colleagues and friends.

In total, 17 categories were used. They were: “self-criticism,” “inform,” “criticize,” “regret,” “apology,” “apology to CCP or alleged victim,” “mercy,” “warning,” “propaganda,” “denial,” “sex,” “money,” “fame,” “confess,” “chaos,” “overseas,” and “anti-China.” In order to saturate the data, other parts of the confession script were coded “details or other” but this was not included in the analysis. (Please see Table 2-1 below).

Table 2-1 Confession categories

Category	Meaning
Self-criticism	Any statement where the speaker made a disparaging judgment about themselves, their own actions or motivations such as “I was a bad influence,” “I made mistakes,” “what I did was wrong,” “I became addicted to this vice,” or “I became a despicable person.” Note, this is not the same as merely explaining how a crime was committed (that was considered to be “details or other”) or saying that they broke the law or committed a crime (that was coded “confess”).

Inform	Any statement where the speaker names or clearly refers to a named person in connection with the case or crime and as playing an active role in that case or crime.
Criticize	Any critical or disparaging statement where the speaker names or clearly refers to a named person; “当时我就觉得这人他不像个老师就是像黑社会” (I thought then that he wasn’t like a teacher, he was like a gangster) (Luo Yuwei (羅玉偉) about Ilham Tohti, 26 September 2014).
Regret	Any clear unambiguous statement of regret, such as “后悔” or “悔恨” and in one case, “愧疚”.
Apology ³⁴	Any clear unambiguous statement of apology, eg “对不起” or “道歉”. This could be a general apology or an apology directed at someone, for example, friends, family or their fans (in the case of celebrities).
Apology to CCP or alleged victim	Any apology to China, the Chinese government, the Party or the CCP or the victims of the alleged crime (for example Chen Yongzhou (陳永洲) apologized to Zoomlion).
Mercy	Any statement where the speaker asks to be forgiven, asks for lenient treatment, and/or says they will turn over a new leaf, never do the alleged crime or misdemeanour again, eg. “如果能出去的话，再不会干这种事了，（我会）好好的在家照顾父母” (If I can get out, I’ll never do this kind of thing again, (I will) stay at home and take good care of my parents) (Mirzat, 22 June 2014).
Warning	Any statement where the speaker says they should be a “warning” (usually using the verb “告诫”) to others not to make the same mistakes as them, eg. “我也告诫那些所谓的维权律师，不要与境外勾联，不要拿境外的钱” (I’m also warning those so-called rights defence lawyers, don’t get

³⁴ In the end, this study did not use this category but it has been retained in case it can be used at a later date.

	involved with overseas (groups), don't take their money.) (Zhang Kai (張凱), 25 February 2016).
Propaganda	Any statement that expresses explicit support or approval for the Party, the CCP, the Chinese government, or any of their organs such as Public Security or the judiciary, or any actions, crackdowns, arrests or laws, new or existing in China, eg. “我坚持坚信政府的定型” (I will continue to strongly believe in the government's decisions) (Zhai Yanmin ((翟岩民), 22 June 2015).
Denial	This category can be spotted in the confession script but can only be definitively coded with data from the background of the case. “Denial” is any statement by the speaker that is clearly aimed at contradicting criticisms from overseas or at home. For example, the outcry over the disappearance of publisher Gui Minhai (桂敏海) from his Thailand holiday home was “denied” through a televised confession when he said that it was his choice to go back to the mainland (there is strong evidence that he was abducted by China extra-legally ³⁵) or Swedish NGO worker, Peter Dahlin saying that he had been treated well in detention with good food, ample sleep and access to medicine (media interviews with Dahlin later revealed this was not true). A denial is not necessarily (although often appears to be) a lie; it is a possible “use” of the televised confessions to address accusations and rumours that the Chinese government does not choose to address through official means, or supplements with these confessions.
Sex	When the speaker makes any reference to sex including prostitution and promiscuity. For the main confessor this is within the context of a “self-criticism;” for the supporting

³⁵ Holmes, O. & Philips, T. (2015, December 8). Gui Minhai: the strange disappearance of a publisher that riled China's elite. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/08/gui-minhai-the-strange-disappearance-of-a-publisher-who-riled-chinas-elite>

	confessor this is within the context of a “criticism.”
Money	When the speaker makes any reference to money as a motivation to commit the alleged crime. For the main confessor this is within the context of a “self-criticism;” for the supporting confessor this is within the context of a “criticism.”
Fame	When the speaker makes any reference to fame (知名度), or vanity (虚荣心) as a motive for committing the alleged crime. For the main confessor this is within the context of a “self criticism;” for the supporting confessor this is within the context of a “criticism.”
Confess	Any statement when the speaker either says “I confess”, that they “committed a crime” (犯罪), or that they are willing to accept the legal consequences, eg. “会去接受法律的制裁” (I will accept the legal consequences) (Mr Jian, 15 April 2016).
Chaos	Any statement that says the alleged crime led to social disorder (“扰乱社会秩序”) or chaos (“乱想”).
Overseas	Any reference to foreign forces, or overseas organizations, eg. “他经常联合国外的媒体来炒他代理的教案” (He often hyped up the cases he took on with international media) (Liu Peng (劉鵬), 25 February 2016) or western universal values and democratic rights “西方的这个普世价值和民主人权” ((Wang Yu (王宇), 1 August 2016).
Anti-China	Any statement that explicitly describes an intention, behaviour or person as anti-China, anti-Party, anti-Chinese government, anti-CCP, or wishing to split or subvert the state “危害国家的利益” (endanger the nation’s interests), Gao Yu (高瑜), 8 May 2014).

Content analysis was used on the confession transcripts to code for occurrences of these categories for both main confessors and supporting confessors.

However, during advanced data analysis it was decided that because the role of the supporting confessor is almost entirely focused on either giving details about the alleged crime or smearing the main confessor and/or off-screen target, the bulk of the analysis on supporting confessors only used the categories of inform, criticize, sex, money, fame and anti-China.

Visual and guilt scores

All broadcasts (each occurrence on one of the four previously listed channels) was watched and coded for each confessor (both main and supporting) on nine categories: “prison clothing,” “handcuffs,” “locked to table,” “behind bars,” “shaved head,” “police interrogation,” “police walk,” “signing confession,” and “face blurred.” These were further subdivided into two groups – soft guilt (“prison clothing,” “handcuffs,” “police interrogation,” “police walk,” and “signing confession”) – images that express the idea of guilt through modern police procedural techniques and hard guilt (“shaved head,” “behind bars,” and “locked to table”) – images that express guilt that is stronger and more humiliating (please see Table 2-2 below). Soft guilt scores for confessors and confession events were calculated from the number of categories seen under soft guilt (maximum score of 5) and hard guilt scores were coded from the number of categories seen under hard guilt (maximum score of 3).

Table 2-2 Visual codes

Code	Meaning
Prison clothing	The suspect is wearing a prison vest (usually orange, but sometimes blue, yellow, or green).
Handcuffs	The suspect is handcuffed. If handcuffs are not seen, this does not necessarily mean he/she is not wearing them, but since this is a visual code, if they are not seen this variable is coded no. Often the camera will focus on the cuffed hands.
Locked to table	The suspect is clamped to a table. This is considered an extreme version of the handcuffs. Only seen with Uighur suspects.

Behind bars	The suspect is behind bars or in a cage (like a zoo animal).
Shaved head	The suspect has a shaved head; both humiliating and dehumanizing and an indicator that there is a strong intention to show the suspect as guilty even though they have not yet gone to trial.
Police interrogation	The suspect is shown being questioned by police officers sat behind desks. It may give an impression of due process and orderly police procedure.
Police walk	China's answer to the US' "perp walk". The suspect is shown between two policemen usually walking down a corridor or coming up stairs in a prison or detention centre.
Signing confession	The confessor is filmed writing and/or signing a piece of paper, an indicator that there is an intention to show the suspect as willingly confessing and that police procedures are being followed.
Face blurred	The suspect's face is pixelated. Since different channels adopt different face blurring rules for the same confession event (for example Peter Humphrey has his face blurred for CCTV13 but not for CCTV9) this may be more a function of the TV news show's producer that day. Curiously, the identity of the blurred-out suspect is usually given (for example their full name and their voice is not disguised). Often non-suspects who give interviews, sometimes police officers connected with the case, not only have their face blurred (despite the fact they are official representatives), but also often hide behind a pot plant to ensure their identity cannot be made out behind the blurring!

Themes

During the advanced data analysis stage, themes were designed to capture groups of categories that were similar and expressed the most obvious features of these confessions (Birks & Mills, 2015). Scores for each theme were calculated for each confession event. A single occurrence by at least one main confessor in the

confession event would score 1 (only a score of 1 or 0 was recorded for each confession event, this avoided weighting higher those confession events with more than one main confessor). The calculation of “inform” was counted for each supporting confessor to reflect the decision to use more than one supporting confessor in the news package (in one case, eight were used)! All other supporting confessor codes were recorded as 1 for single or multiple occurrences, or 0 for no occurrences. See Table 2-3 below for a breakdown.

Table 2-3 Themes and their categories

Themes	Category	Maximum score
Intimidation (main confessor codes only)	Self-criticism + criticism + inform + apology to CCP/alleged victim + mercy + regret + confess + sex + \$ + fame)	10
Propaganda (main confessor codes only)	Warning + propaganda + regret	3
Smear (both, not self referential)	Inform (each instance) + criticize + sex + \$ + fame + Anti-China	No limit (depends on number of self confessors)
Anti-China (both)	Chaos + overseas + anti-China	3

Scope of data

Only televised confessions where the subject was labelled “suspect” (嫌疑罪犯) were used (in a small number of cases the confessor was not labelled suspect but the news story clearly defined them as a suspect so these were included). All suspects in this study were pre-arrest or pre-trial. Confessions under other circumstances, such as televised courtroom confessions (another new trend), were not included. There were two exceptions – (Lam Wing-kee (林榮基) and Wang Yu) whose confessions were broadcast following their release on bail. These were included because they were both technically still suspects. Lam escaped to Hong

Kong, while Wang Yu was under what some call “non-release release” (Cohen, 2016b).

As part of Xi’s crackdown on corruption, dozens of confessions by detained CCP officials have been posted on the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CDIC) website³⁶ and several have also been aired on state media. Because CCP members are not initially handled by the Security Bureau (rather they are overseen by the CDIC), cases are investigated under the secretive shuanggui (雙規) process rather than the country’s legal system. The motivations for these types of in-Party confessions are likely to differ from those of the general public and so they do not form part of this study. The exception is Lin Zuluang (林祖鑾) who has been included because the public were involved (Wukan villagers protested when Lin was detained and again after his confession was aired).

The rest of the news package (which can feature graphics, interviews with police and witnesses and other footage) was discarded because of time and language constraints and the need to keep this research focused and simple. The confessions themselves are the new phenomenon and not the news of the alleged crime.

Clearly all of these – courtroom confessions, CCP confessions, and the entire confession news package – are worthy of further research.

Long-form, semi-structured interviews

Questions were selected according to the experience and expertise of the interviewee. Attempts were made to include five different types of interviewee: 1) individuals who made a televised confession in mainland China; 2) individuals who were pressured to make a recorded confession but resisted; 3) activists (including lawyers, legal scholars, and journalists) from mainland China who have been detained but who were not pressured into doing a televised confession; 4) journalists from CCTV or one of the other media organizations that broadcast these televised confessions; 5) scholars whose area is Chinese human rights or China’s legal system. Because of the sensitivity of this topic every effort was made to conduct the

³⁶在跟社会的结交上是最大的失败 (2015, March 18). Retrieved from <http://v.ccdi.gov.cn/2015/03/06/VIDE1425629761573337.shtml>

interviews discreetly (using encrypted messaging services). Please see Appendix II for framework of questions for different interviewees.

Where possible, interviews were conducted over Skype in English when the interviewee had the time and was also living outside the mainland. Interviews that could be conducted in Taiwan were made face-to-face. For interviewees still living in the mainland, encrypted messaging apps were used and the interview was conducted with the written questions and answers in Chinese. All spoken interviews were recorded, transcribed, and if not in English, translated into English. Written interviews in Chinese were then also translated into English. Face-to-face and Skype interviews averaged between 1 and 2 hours. Written interviews, for practical reasons, were much shorter, but ran to at least 12 open-ended questions.



Chapter 3: Exploring the broadcasts

Data from the broadcasts – oral, visual and factual – were analysed using a modified grounded theory approach to find the range of televised confessions and look for patterns and a typology of confessions.

Altogether 40 confession events were found spread more or less evenly across the four years between 2013 and 2016 with the most common format a single confessor, usually a male Han Chinese (but there were also comparatively high proportions of Uighur and non-mainlander suspects). There was evidence that some confessions were aired to coincide with a new law or a crackdown. The vast majority involved police or state security units in Beijing, along the eastern seaboard or in Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Broadcasts mimicked a “play” with main and supporting actors who took on very different roles: main confessors focused on their alleged crime and their emotional response, while supporting confessors denounced the main confessor and/or off-screen targets. Around one quarter of main confessors were released without charge or on bail within a year after the broadcast. The majority involved cases with a political score that was medium or high; their confessions showed much stronger evidence of an intent to shame and their alleged crime remained “imprecise” or “ambiguously” vocalised. Cases with a low political score recorded much higher visual indicators of guilt with confessions that contained clear details about the crime. A typology of four types – Intimidation, Smear, Propaganda and Guilt – was found as well as nine Denial videos which appeared to be a direct response to criticisms levelled against China. Lastly, many of the confessions displayed factual, editorial or logical issues which cast doubt on their truthfulness such as changing details about the crime or the crime itself between multiple confessions or the confession and the trial, suspicious editing, retractions by several confessors and the focus of the confessions on an off-screen target.

Overall picture

Altogether, 40 confession events were found between 2013 and 2016. The most common format was a single main confessor, but five had two main confessors and two had no main confessors, just supporting confessors (who attacked off-screen targets). There were a total of 38 main confessors, four of whom appeared in two or more confession events as main confessors. There were a total of 40 supporting

confessors, three of whom were also main confessors on separate broadcasts. This gives (38 + 37) or 75 different confessors in total.

These 40 confession events represent 90 broadcasts – five of which were on non-national TV channels (all broadcast in 2016). The length of the confession news segment varied from just under 3 minutes to around 30 minutes. (Please see Table 3-1 for a summary).

Table 3-1 Overview of confession events (2013-2016)

Confession events	Broadcasts	Main confessors	Supporting confessors
40	90	38	40

It is possible that other confessions were broadcast on national TV and not detected in this study, but it is unlikely that these were large in number. So although this sample of 40 confession events cannot statistically be considered a population, it can be used to understand the approximate range of suspects and cases in televised confessions aired between 2013 and 2016 in China.

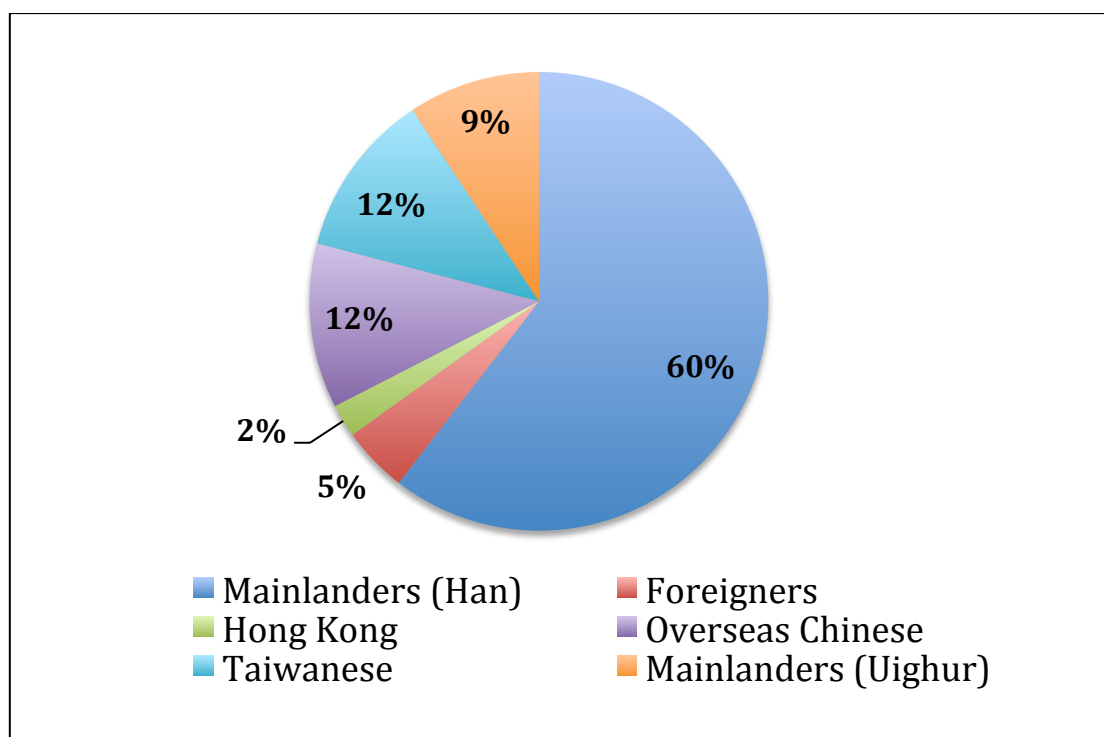
Nationality distribution of main confessors

The majority (60%) were mainlanders (Han Chinese). Mainlanders (Uighurs) made up 9% of main confessors (yet less than 1% of Chinese people are Uighur). Note, this percentage would also be higher if Ilham Tohti’s students were counted as main confessors (they are coded as supporting confessors).

There are also high proportions of foreigners (5%), Hongkongers (2%), overseas Chinese (12%) and Taiwanese (12%), relative to their proportions in mainland China and the ratios for prison populations.³⁷ Please see Figure 3-1 below for breakdown.

³⁷ Please see University of London’s World Prison Brief (<http://www.prisonstudies.org/country/china>)

Figure 3-1 Nationality, main confessor



Note: Repeat performances are counted, to take into account the decision to broadcast more than one confession event with the same suspect. This makes the total number of main confessors here 43, not 38; it can be thought of as “main confessor appearances.”

Since this is a small sample (43), a change of just one person makes a change in proportion of two percentage points.

Gender distribution

Main confessor appearances (total 43, please see note to Figure 3-1) were predominantly male – 91% or 39 were male and four (9%) were female. Of the three female main confessors (Gao Yu (高瑜), Guo Meimei (郭美美) and Wang Yu (王宇))

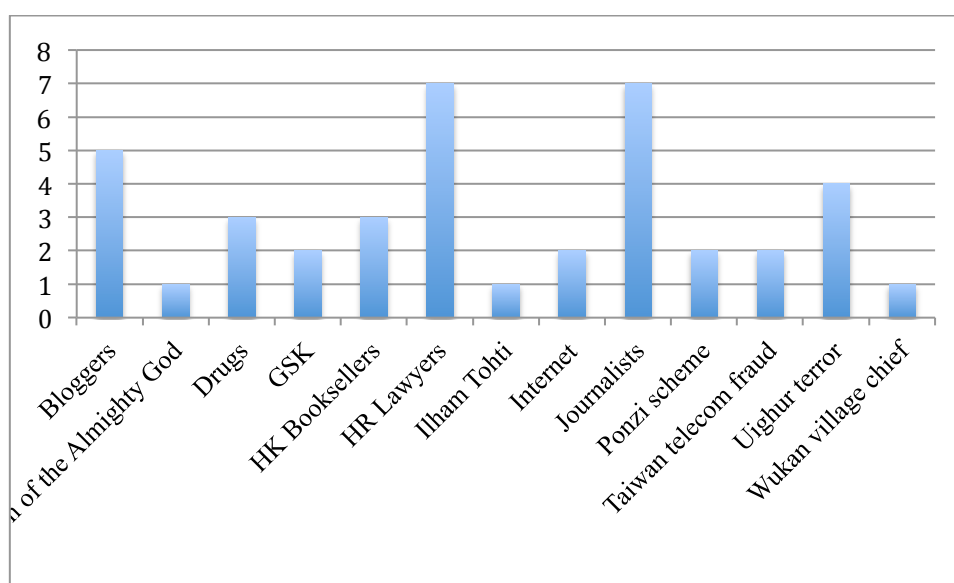
Wang Yu made two confession videos. This gender ratio conforms to reported prisoner ratios; the University of London’s World Prison Brief recorded 6.5% of prisoners in China in 2015 as women (with just 0.4% foreigners).³⁸

³⁸ <http://www.prisonstudies.org/country/china>

Distribution of groups

The 40 confession events were divided into 13 groups according to main confessor/off-screen target or apparent target group. While group naming was done for convenience only, eyeballing the distribution showed that there was a clear slant towards groups that are typically associated with civil rights and free speech issues. Human Rights Lawyers (7), Journalists (7) and Bloggers (5) made up 19 out of 40 confession events (or 48%). For breakdown, please see Figure 3-2 below.

Figure 3-2 Distribution of groups



If the data is examined yearly, group clusters are apparent (please see Figure 3-3 below). Bloggers only appear in 2013, coinciding with the new anti-online rumour law of September 2013.³⁹ Similarly the focus in 2015 was on human rights lawyers, coinciding with the 709 Crackdown of July in the same year.⁴⁰ Journalists appear the most consistently across the three years (2013 to 2015), suggesting they are a regular ongoing target and not related to a specific crackdown. This study called those confessions that coincided with well-publicized crackdowns, “crackdown confessions.”

³⁹ China threatens tough punishment for online rumor spreading (2013, September 9), *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-internet-idUSBRE9880CQ20130909>

⁴⁰ Starting on 9 July 2015, around 300 human rights lawyers, activists and their families and colleagues were detained in a concerted crackdown on the rights defense movement (*weiqun*, 維權). Since then, while many have been released, as of July 2017, two were in prison and three were awaiting trial (Human Rights Watch, 2017)

Figure 3-3 Groups by year (2013-2016)



Geographical jurisdiction

Figure 3-4 below shows the branch of police or state security responsible for each main confessor appearance. The vast majority (just under half) were in Beijing (19 out of 40); with sizeable numbers in Xinjiang (5), Shanghai (4), Zhejiang (4) and Shandong (2). There is also one case marked undisclosed (Wang Yu’s first confession). Several of the confessors who had been disappeared (被失踪) had their location hidden in these broadcasts – the HK Booksellers confessions were located from data supplied by the US’ Congressional-Executive Commission on China’s prisoner database.⁴¹

The jurisdiction did not always match the location of the crime. This may be an indication of fragmented authoritarianism or may simply be because cases are routinely relocated to jurisdictions where “the police feel greater confidence in

⁴¹ Please see <http://ppdcecc.gov/QueryResultsSummary.aspx>

controlling the judicial system.”⁴² Chen Yongzhou (陳永洲) in Guangdong was moved to Changsha, and Liang Hong (梁鴻) was also moved from Shanghai to Changsha. The high proportion of cases in Beijing could be for a number of reasons – like everywhere news in a capital city is always deemed more newsworthy. It could also be that channels of communication between the security bureau and CCTV are smoother in Beijing.

Figure 3-4 Jurisdiction by confession events



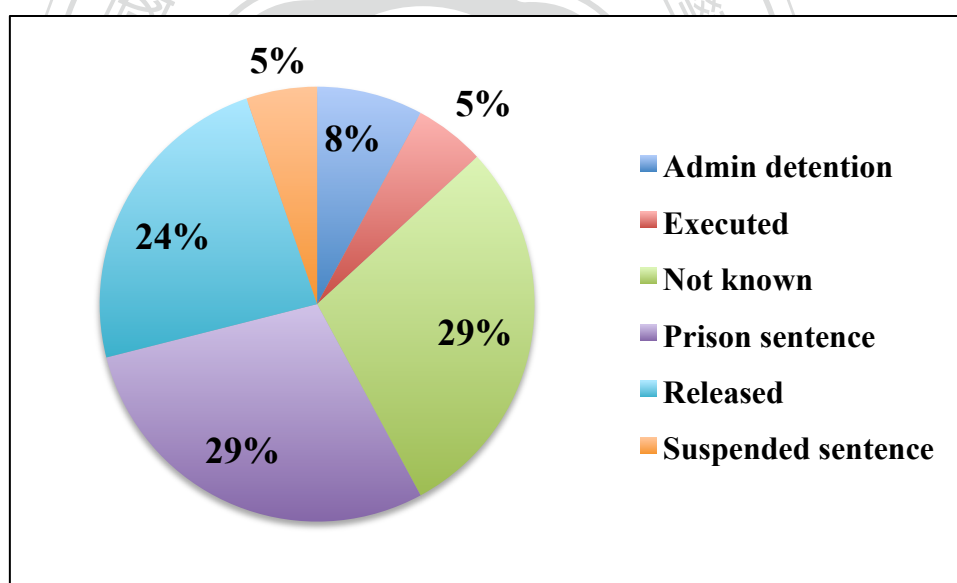
Source: Map outline from <http://www.mapsopensource.com/china-outline-map.html>

⁴²Cohen argues that Changsha and Tianjin are often used as bases to prosecute political suspects. Cohen, J. (2017, 20 April). A Taiwanese Man’s Detention in Guangdong Threatens a Key Pillar of Cross-Straits Relations. *ChinaFile*. Retrieved from <http://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/taiwanese-mans-detention-guangdong-threatens-key-pillar-of-cross-straits#comment-4761>

Distribution of outcomes for main confessors

Surprisingly 24% (or nine) of the main confessors were released (please see Figure 3-5 below). This included released on bail, released without charge, and also one skipped bail case (Lam Wing-kee (林榮基), who refused to return to the mainland once he arrived in Hong Kong). This high proportion of non-prosecutions is another indication that the confessions are likely for “show.” All those who were released had political scores of medium or high. All cases with a low political score went to trial (or are awaiting trial). Not known refers to suspects who have been disappeared (Gui Minhai (桂敏海)) or others who are awaiting trial (many of those from 2016 fall into this category). There were two confirmed executions for the two murder cases. Administrative detention is usually for 14 days or less, and here it refers to drugs possession charges.

Figure 3-5 Outcomes by main confessor



Xinwenlianbo broadcasts

China’s most closely watched news program, *Xinwenlianbo* (XWLB), by the public and the Party, should only broadcast the most important confessions. Of the 40 confession events, 11 appear on XWLB. Please see Table 3-2 below for a list of the confession events broadcast on XWLB.

Table 3-2 Xinwenlianbo confession events

Reference	Political score	No. MCs	No. SCs	Denial?
15-07-13-GSK-Liang Hong	medium	1	1	no
22-08-13-Bloggers-Qin-Lier	medium	2	0	no
29-08-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue	medium	1	5	no
13-05-14-Journalists-Xiang Nanfu	medium	1	0	no
31-05-14-Church of the Almighty God-Zhang Lidong	low	1	0	no
25-06-14-Uighur terror-Mirzat	high	1	0	no
22-06-15-HR Lawyers-Zhai-Liu	high	2	2	no
12-07-15-HR Lawyers-3 lawyers	high	0	3	no
19-07-15-HR lawyers-Zhou Shifeng	high	1	8	no
01-02-16-Ponzi scheme-Ding Ning	low	1	4	no
15-04-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Jian-Xu	low	2	0	no

Key: MC = main confessor, SC = supporting confessor.

No Denial videos were broadcast on XWLB, but all political scores, high, medium and low, and a variety of formats – one main confessor, two main confessors, no main confessors and zero to eight self confessors – were found. All years are represented as well as the very first confession – in fact the first three confessions all appeared on XWLB. All three of the summer 2015 Human Rights Lawyers confessions were broadcast on XWLB indicating the 709 Crackdown had very high-level support. The remainder were high profile criminal cases and two confessions whose inclusion is puzzling. They were the confession of Xiang Nanfu was a writer for overseas Chinese website Boxun, and in the end he was released and Mirzat, the only Uighur suspect shown on XWLB in this study, whose crime was less serious than many other Uighurs who confessed (he attacked several people with an axe but it is not apparent that he killed anyone).

Main and supporting confessors

During the initial stages of data collection it was very clear there were two types of confessors. To reflect their apparent “roles,” this study has called them main confessors and supporting confessors – their functions can be compared to lead and supporting actors in a stage play. The main confessor was the obvious focus of the news report – their name may feature in the headline, their face may be made into a “logo” for the news report, and they are most often identified in the first few seconds of the news item. There is usually no ambiguity in who is a main confessor. It is their “confession” that is the news story. Most of their confession script focuses on their alleged crime while also sometimes touching on their emotional response and/or motive.

While most confessions only have one main confessor, 17 (43%) of the 40 confession events, feature supporting confessors. Supporting confessors typically have their identity hidden (name is partially given, face is blurred), while their confession is focused on the alleged crimes of the main confessors and/or off-screen targets. A small number of main confessors also appeared in a later broadcast as a supporting confessor (for example, Zhai Yanmin and Liu Jianjun (劉建軍)).

In the interests of analysing these different roles and addressing data complexity (90 broadcasts and 75 confessors), this study coded these two types of confessors separately (complete confession and visual data were collected on both, but factual data was collected only on main confessors).

Looking only at CCTV13 or equivalent broadcasts, the ratio of main confessors to supporting confessors was 43:43. The ratio of main confessors to supporting confessors with their face blurred was 9:9, so it seems there is no apparent difference in how supporting and main confessors are treated with the option of face blurring. It could be a decision that is made on a case by case basis – for example celebrities tend to get their faces blurred (Ko Chen-tung (柯震東) and Zhang Yuan (張元), the first foreigner to be aired (Peter Humphrey) and some of the supporting confessors in cases with a medium or high political score, are also given this privilege. In that sense, blurring the face can be considered a “courtesy” to the suspect. In many cases, witnesses and sometimes oddly too, the police have their faces blurred. In several broadcasts, police were not only blurred, but they were obscured by a pot plant! Another curious feature is that faces are blurred, but voices

are not disguised and sometimes their full names are given. So the blurring of the face cannot be about disguising their identity.

All four Taiwanese suspects in the Taiwan fraud case had their faces pixellated. This may be because they were acting as “faceless” representatives of all 45 Taiwanese suspects deported from Kenya. The focus would not be on “them,” but on China’s “right” to bring them from Kenya to be tried, rather than let them be returned to their home country, Taiwan.

Blurring also seems to be an internal decision made by the program’s producer. For example, several confessors whose face was concealed on Chinese-language CCTV stations were not blurred on the English-language CCTV9 channel.

Main confessors scored slightly higher on hard guilt (maximum score 3) than supporting confessors (please see Figure 3-6 below) with an average score of 0.53 for main confessors compared with 0.4 for supporting confessors. The difference was much more striking for soft guilt scores (maximum score 5), with main confessors averaging 2.23 to supporting confessors’ 0.88.

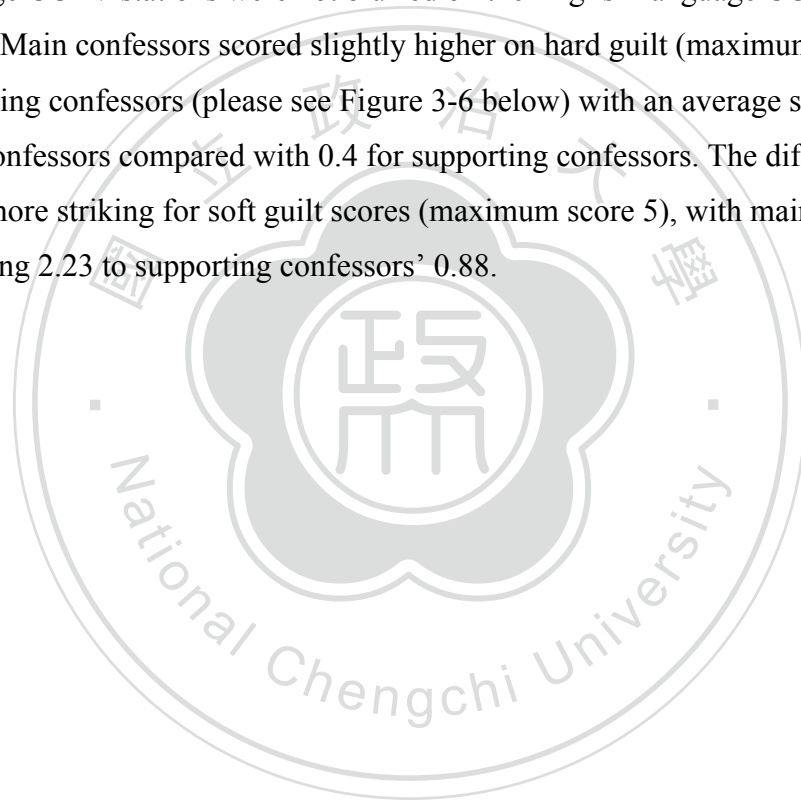
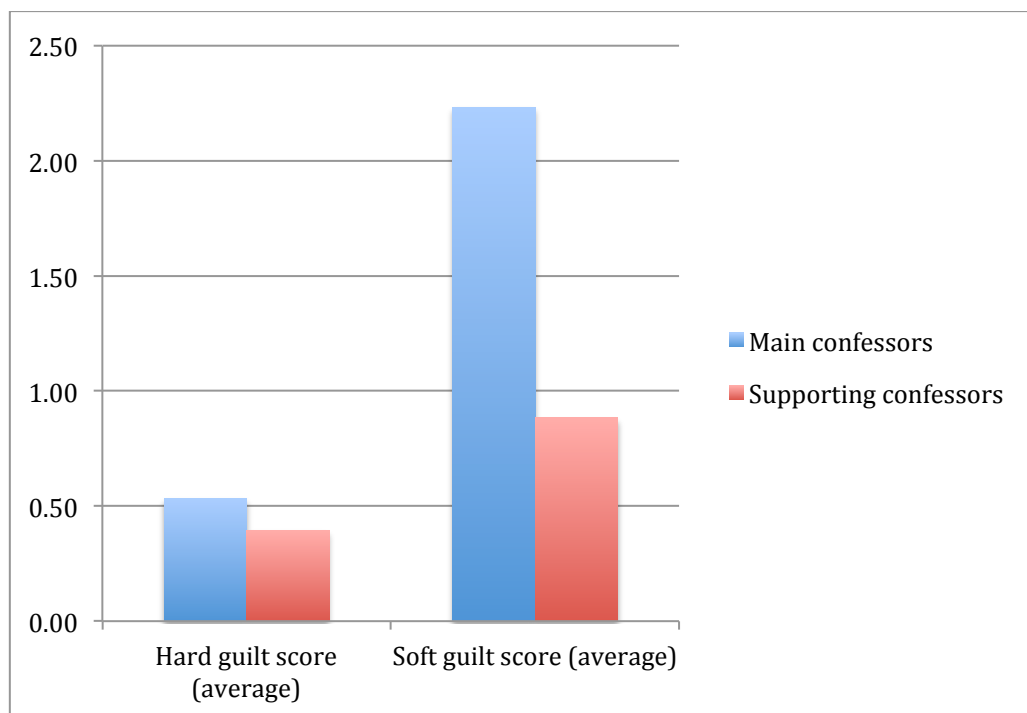


Figure 3-6 Average guilt scores by confessor (CCTV13 or equivalent)



Looking at the individual guilt categories, only main confessors are shown signing confessions (seven in total, all with medium or high political scores); handcuffs are three times more likely to be seen on screen with main confessors (17 compared with five supporting confessors). Similarly prison walks are also three times more likely to occur with main confessors (18) than with supporting confessors (six).

Turning to the confession scripts, main confessors had a higher average score for the 13 categories than supporting confessors; 2.88 compared with 1.70. Some 21 main confessors made a self-criticism compared with just three supporting confessors. Please see Figure 3-7 for comparisons for all 13 categories.

Figure 3-7 Confession scores by category by confessor type (CCTV13 or equivalent)

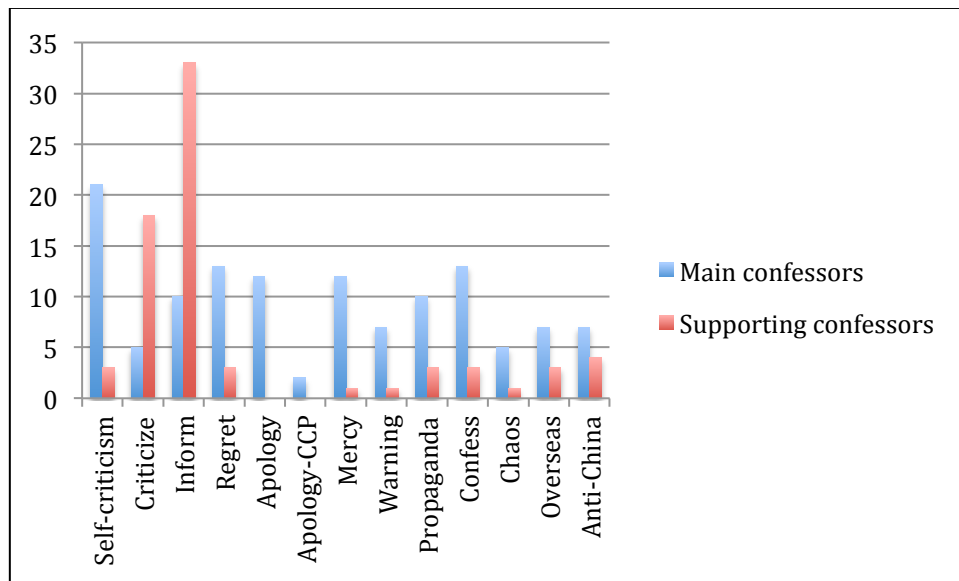


Figure 3-7 shows a huge spike for supporting confessors in the inform and criticize categories, illustrating one of the key “roles” for supporting confessors is to denounce and disparage someone else (usually the main confessor, although sometimes an off-screen target(s)). Main confessors have much higher scores on all other categories, most notably in self-criticism, regret, apology (no self confessors apologized), asking for mercy and confess.

The ‘types’ of confessions

During the process of initial data collection, it was clear that the confessions neatly split into several “pairs”: high political scores versus low political scores, jailhouse versus neutral location, main confessors versus supporting confessors, precise versus vague crimes, and normal versus denial. The fact that there were so many different types of confessions, in itself, indicates that there are several motives at play behind their broadcast. This section investigates these “pairs” of types more closely.

Political scores

Of the 40 confession events in this study, 31 had political scores that were medium or high, while nine had a low political score. This ratio likely reflects that

politically sensitive stories are more often reported by the media and thus more likely to be identified in this study. If the main purpose of the confessions is to enhance CCP legitimacy, then confessions with a higher political score could be more useful because they attract more media attention and thus pack a bigger propaganda punch.

Please see Table 3-3 below for a breakdown of basic data on confession events according to their political scores. Supporting confessors tended to play a much bigger role in confessions with higher political scores (in fact, only one case with a low political score, the Ezubao Ponzi scheme of early 2016, had supporting confessors). The ratio of confession events for different political scores was similar on *Xinwenlianbo* (XWLB) and the average number of channels. The most dramatic difference was that Denial videos were only connected with higher political scores.

Table 3-3 Comparison of confession event data by political score

Category	Higher political score (medium, high)	Low political score
Confession events	31	9
Average number of supporting confessors per confession event	1.29	0.44
Percentage with XWLB broadcast	26%	33%
Percentage of denial	29%	0%
Average channel number per confession event	2.03	2.44

Comparing visual data, the average soft guilt score was almost twice as high for low political score suspects than for higher political score suspects and slightly higher in the same direction for the average hard guilt score. This indicates that more effort was made with low political score suspects to present them as already guilty with images such as prison clothing, handcuffs, and police marches. Please see Figure 3-8 below.

Figure 3-8 Average guilt scores by political score (CCTV13 or equivalent)

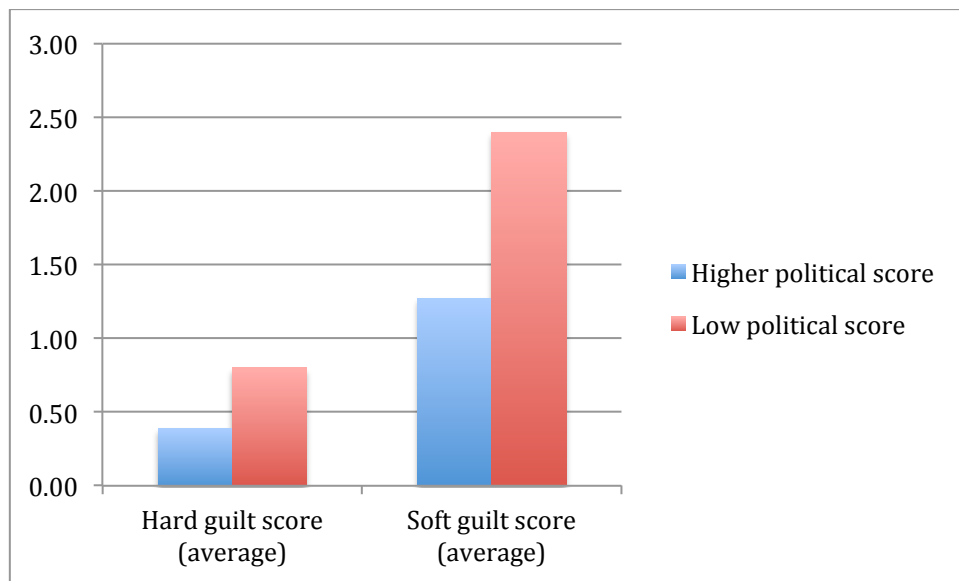
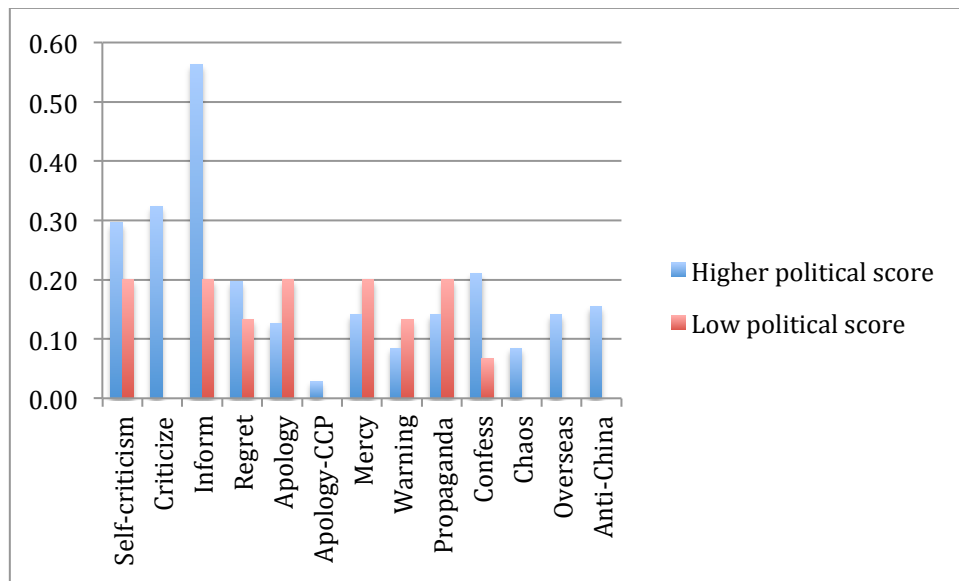


Figure 3-9 below shows the very different spectrum of categories between higher political score cases and low political score cases. Only higher political score cases showed incidences of criticize and apology to the CCP or alleged victims. Occurrences of self-criticism, inform, and confess were also higher for higher political score cases. All anti-China references (chaos, overseas and anti-China) were also only found in higher political score cases. Statements of regret, apology, mercy and propaganda were found in roughly equal rates in both cases, showing some overlap in their purpose.

Figure 3-9 Confession scores by category by political score (CCTV13 or equivalent)



Since there was only one low political score broadcast that included supporting confessors, it was not considered useful to compare supporting confessors separately here. However, it is worth noting that supporting confessors in the low political score case (the Ezubao Ponzi scheme) did not engage in criticizing the main target; their testimony simply added to the details of the crime, with little focus on the main confessor, whereas in the higher political score confessions, supporting confessors were routinely used as an “anonymous chorus” to disparage the main confessor and/or off-screen target(s).

Jailhouse versus neutral location

The environment for the confession was not coded for – it was considered too ambiguous to code because it was difficult in many cases to determine exactly where the confession was shot. Sometimes it was clearly an interrogation room or a detention cell because the suspect appeared behind bars or in a cage or the broadcast segment showed a close up of the interrogation room sign or a shot of the police behind their desks interrogating (or appearing to interrogate) the suspect. Many of the interrogation rooms were decorated with similarly striped wallpaper and featured a digital calendar clock hung high on the wall. However, in many other cases, the suspect simply appeared in front of a blank wall and it was not clear where the

recording was taking place. Many wore civilian clothes without the (usually bright orange or yellow) prison vest. The only indication, visually, that they were a suspect, was their name label (罪犯嫌疑人, criminal suspect) added by the television program.

It is possible to use several of the other visual categories to indicate the location – that is whether the suspect wore prison clothing, whether the interrogation was shown, a police walk was shown, or bars were seen. There were 13 main confessors on CCTV13 or equivalent who were not wearing prison clothes; only one was part of a low political score case – Ning Caishen (寧財神) (Drugs). Suspects in the non-national TV broadcasts all wore civilian clothes. The rest were all higher political score suspects, including the Human Rights Lawyers, HK Booksellers, Wukan Village Chief Lin Zuluang (林祖鑾) and the very first confession event of GSK's Liang Hong. However a number of these still showed evidence of police procedures such as police interrogation and the signing of a confession. Only seven main confessors had a soft guilt score of 0, meaning there were no visual signs of police procedure at all – these were four human rights lawyers, two Hong Kong booksellers, and one journalist. They all shared the same kind of “style” – which was civilian clothing, “matching” black t-shirts for the rights lawyers and a non-descript white wall background; a soft grey jacket for Gui Minhai with what looked like a grey fabric covered wall – it could be a modern office or hotel room; the same background and a black coat for Lam Wing-kee; a smart green shirt for Wang Xiaolu (王曉璐) with a deep red curtain as his background, while Peter Dahlin wore a grey cardigan in front of a nondescript grey papered wall. Finally, Wang Yu's *Phoenix TV* appearance – which is also a special case since she was officially “released on bail” at the time of the interview – was in a Tianjin restaurant garden. *Paper.cn* bizarrely even used background guitar music to accompany the confession.

There appears to be some connection between the stage of investigation at the time of the confession and whether the confession is a jailhouse or neutral location type. Apart from Wang Yu, all of the main confessors appearing in neutral confessions were detained but not yet charged. Peter Dahlin and Zhou Shifeng (周世鋒) were being held under residential surveillance; Wang Xiaolu was reported as being held under criminal compulsory measures; and there is scant information on Gui Minhai. At the time of completing this thesis his whereabouts are still unknown.

Precise versus vague crimes

There was also a very obvious split between confessions that clearly described an alleged crime and those that were markedly vague. This was thought to be too subjective to code, but it was something that emerged during the data analysis and repeated viewings of the confession tapes.

All of the low political score cases were of the “precise” type; the confessions included details of how that crime was carried out. For example, the confessors in the Taiwan Telecom Fraud case explained the process they used to call people on the mainland and trick them into giving out their bank account information; the two Ponzi Scheme confessions also elaborated on how their investment products were run as Ponzi schemes; in his drug possession case, Ning Caishen said: “I’ve been taking drugs for about seven months. Each time I buy about 1,000 yuan’s worth [of ice];” and the most spectacular, Zhang Lidong (張立冬), who helped beat a woman to death in a McDonald’s in 2014, said: “I hit her very hard. And then stamped on her.. I stamped on her head.”

In contrast, the confessions of higher political score suspects were “imprecise” and “ambiguous;” and broadly speaking there were two types. The first were those where the confessors appear to be simply admitting to unsocial or irresponsible behaviour, such as Charles Xue (薛必群) saying he would forward Weibo posts without checking whether they were true or not, or even Guo Meimei saying she changed her Weibo details to pretend she was a general manager at Red Cross China in a fit of vanity – behaviour that hardly warrants detention and the broadcast of a confession on national TV. The second type are confessions that refer to criminal behaviour – but do not specify any details about the crime. For example, veteran journalist Gao Yu’s confession in 2014: “I believe that I broke the law and harmed national interests,” she said without elaborating on what that meant. She was later tried and found guilty of leaking state secrets (thought to be Document No. 9⁴³) to overseas media. On 19 July 2015, Zhou Shifeng said that he “condoned and encouraged” his lawyers to commit unlawful activities, but he did not specify what those were. The news report accused his firm of being part of a criminal gang, but

⁴³ The secret Party paper, Document No. 9, came out in April, 2013, just a few months before the first televised confession. An English translation of Document 9 can be found at <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>

none of the confessions (there were eight supporting confessors in this broadcast) said they had done anything worse than hyping up a case and organizing protests outside courtrooms. A year later lawyer Zhou was sentenced to seven years for state subversion.⁴⁴

Normal versus Denial

One of the most curious findings from the data analysis was the existence of what this study calls “Denial” videos. A Denial video is characterized by the contents of the confession or it may be apparent by the timing of the broadcast and events immediately before. All of them are responding to criticisms (which could be from the international community – governments, media, civil society, Hong Kong and even in one case, from mainland China itself) about the suspect’s case. Usually, but not always, the suspect’s confession contains a rebuttal of that criticism but the obvious aim of the confession is to quash the accusations. In some ways, these confessions can be seen as a kind of “conversation” between the Party and the accuser with the suspect used as a puppet or mouthpiece to express the Party’s view. Since there are just nine Denial confession events out of a total of 40, they are listed below in Table 3-4 with brief explanations.

Interestingly, none of the Denial videos were broadcast on XWLB. At least one Denial video was broadcast per year with the greatest number (six, or 2/3 of the total) aired in 2016, indicating that it is an established response.

⁴⁴ Chinese lawyer gets 7 years in prison for state subversion (2016, August 4), *Xinhua News*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-08/04/c_135563910.htm

Table 3-4 Denial confession events (2013-2016)

Case	Responding to
Chen Yongzhou, Journalists, 26 October 2013	Chen's newspaper, <i>New Express</i> after they published two front-page ads calling for his release with “请放人” (Please release him) in giant characters. ⁴⁵ The confession appeared to be an attempt to “prove” that Chen was guilty of accepting bribes in return for writing fake stories.
Ilham Tohti's students, 26 September 2014	Supporters of Ilham Tohti inside and outside China who criticized the decision to give him a life sentence for separatism. His sentencing was on 23 September, three days later CCTV4 aired this confession, in which the three students criticised their former professor. Luo Yuwei (羅玉偉) said: “He wasn't like a teacher, he was like a gangster.”
Wang Yu, Human Rights Lawyers, 17 October 2015	The international community who accused China of using Wang Yu's son as a hostage after he was captured with two rights activists near the Myanmar border as they were trying to help smuggle him out of China on 9 October 2015. Wang Yu and her husband, who was also detained, were shown looking very distressed. She said: “I don't have anything to do with this organization [that tried to smuggle her son out of China]... I don't want this to happen again... as his parent, I hope the police can protect him.”
Gui Minhai, HK Booksellers, 17 January 2016	Hong Kong people and the international community for accusing China of kidnapping Gui Minhai from his Thailand home in November 2015 because he had published racy books about Xi Jinping. Gui, who holds Swedish citizenship, said in his confession: “It was my own choice to come back and surrender. It has nothing to do with anyone else. I also don't want any individual or organization and that includes Sweden to intervene

⁴⁵ Boehler, P. (2013, October 23). Please release him: Guangdong newspaper in rare public appeal for freedom of journalist. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from (<http://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1337815/please-release-him-guangdong-newspaper-appeals-release-journalist>)

	or interfere in my case.”
Peter Dahlin, Human Rights Lawyers, 19 January 2016	The international community for calling on China to release detained Swedish national Peter Dahlin – and for accusing the authorities of not allowing him to meet with his embassy and of mistreating him. The news broke around 12 January that he was being detained for endangering state security. Just a week later, Dahlin appears in a video confession to say: “I have no complaints to make. I think my treatment has been fair... I have been given good food. Plenty of sleep... And I have also been given the opportunity to meet with representatives from my embassy.”
Gui Minhai, HK Booksellers, 28 February 2016	Hong Kong people and the international community for accusing China of illegally detaining Gui Minhai. Gui Minhai and three of the four other Hong Kong bookseller detainees appear on <i>Phoenix TV</i> to say that Gui Minhai was guilty of “illegal activities” in selling banned books to mainland customers.
Lin Zuluán, Wukan Village Chief, 21 June 2016	Wukan villagers – some 2,000 – who came out to protest the arrest of their village chief on corruption charges. Lin’s confession was aired at a press conference, where he admitted to taking bribes. As well as the confession being aired on state TV, it was sent to the social media accounts of the villagers ⁴⁶ (indicating the target audience were Wukan villagers).
Lam Wing-kee, HK Booksellers, 6 July 2016	Lam Wing-kee’s Hong Kong and international supporters after Lam gave a press conference on 16 June 2016 claiming that he had been abducted by Chinese security services and forced to make a confession. ⁴⁷ This July denial confession used old footage of Lam saying that he had broken the law by bringing illegal

⁴⁶ Wen, P. (2016, June 22). ‘Confession’ of China’s first democratically-elected mayor Lin Zuluán. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.smh.com.au/world/confession-of-chinas-first-democratically-elected-mayor-lin-zuluán-20160622-gpp16y.html>

⁴⁷ Siu, P., Ng, K-C. & Fung, O. (2016, June 16). Bookseller Lam Wing-kee reveals explosive details of his mainland China detention, claims Lee Po told him he was ‘taken away from Hong Kong’. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/1976489/bookseller-lam-wing-kee-reveals-explosive-details-his>

	books into China, listening to a policeman read out his bail conditions, and reading and eating in detention.
Wang Yu, Human Rights Lawyers, 1 August 2016	Supporters of Zhou Shifeng – his controversial trial in Tianjin which received huge international media attention – was held just three days later on 4 August. In this confession, Wang Yu praises China’s judiciary, disparages Zhou Shifeng as a lawyer, again condemns those who plotted to smuggle her son out of the country, rejects a human rights award from overseas, and describes Fengrui Law firm as one that tried to attack and blacken the government and to lay the foundations for a colour revolution in China.

Interview versus edited interrogation footage

The confessions either took the form of a formal interview (media or the police “acting” as the media) or edits of interrogation tapes. Because it is difficult to determine accurately between these in many cases this was not coded for in this study.

Curiously, media interviews almost never show the reporter in the shot. Sometimes the only clue that it was a media interview was that the microphone was visible in the frame or that the voice of the journalist or police was heard off camera. Media interviews tended to appear more professional, with better sound quality and lighting. Police interviews were similar to media interviews, but looked less professional, these also sometimes had the suspect looking straight into the camera. Edits from interrogations were of the lowest quality, in terms of sound, lighting and camera angle. If these could be coded for they might reveal valuable information about these confessions.

Typology of confession events

By comparing thematic scores it was possible to derive a basic typology of confession events. Note that absolute values are meaningless since they have different numbers of categories. For this study, to qualify as anti-China, anti-China score ≥ 1 ; Propaganda, propaganda score ≥ 1 (if includes propaganda), ≥ 2 (if does not include

propaganda); Smear, smear score ≥ 2 ; and Shame, shame score ≥ 3 were used to qualify. Please see Table 3-5 below for a breakdown of confession events by type.

Table 3-5 Confession events by type

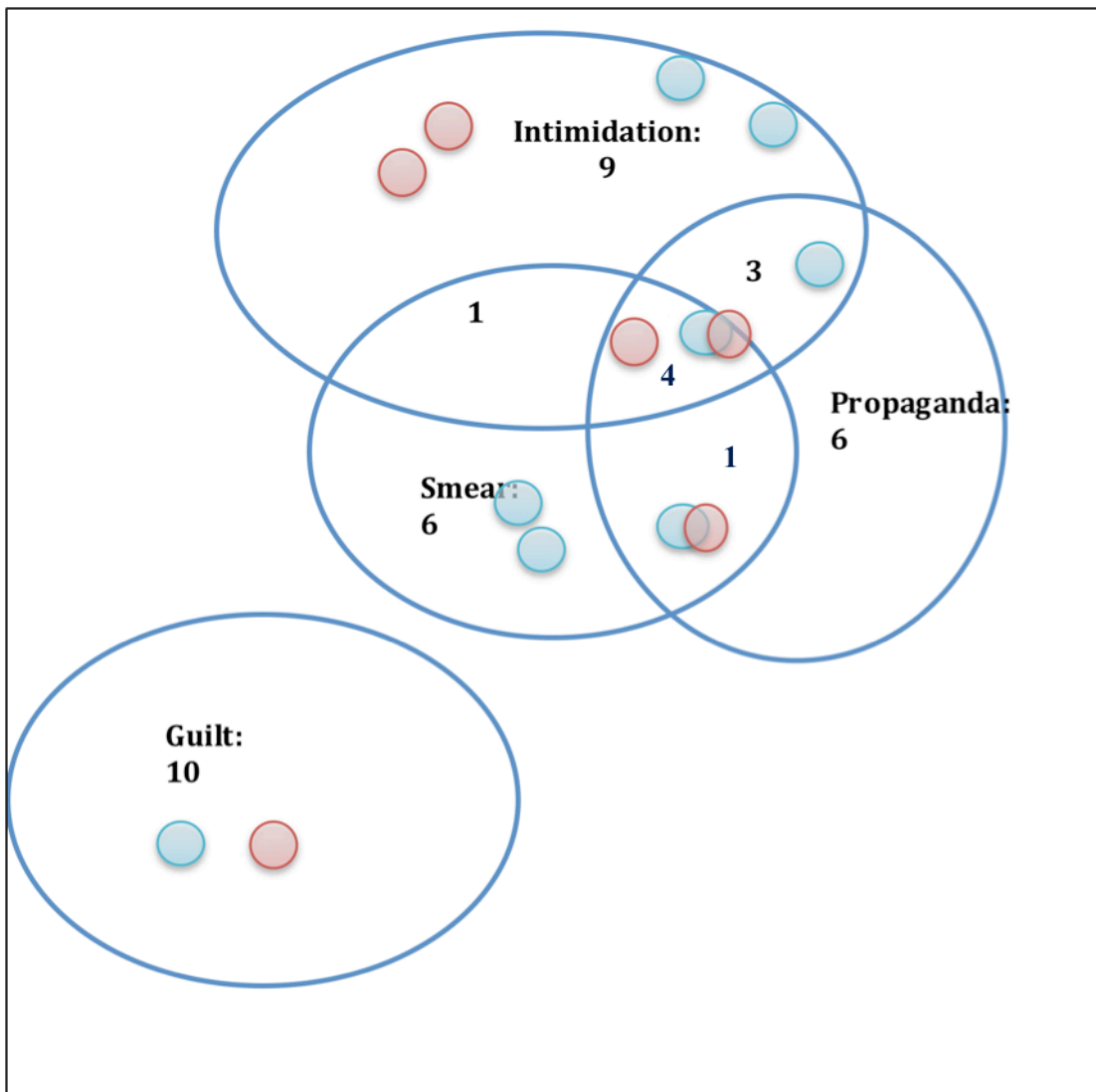
Reference	Prop-			Type
	Shame score	aganda score	Smear score	
15-07-13-GSK-Liang Hong	2	0	1	Guilt
22-08-13-Bloggers-Qin-Lier	3	0	0	Intimidation
27-08-13-GSK-Peter Humphrey	3	1	0	Intimidation
29-08-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue	3	0	6	Intimidation, Smear
15-09-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue	3	1	1	Intimidation, Propaganda
29-09-13-Bloggers-Dong-Xue	2	2	1	Propaganda
17-10-13-Bloggers-Dong Rubin	1	0	1	Guilt
26-10-13-Journalists-Chen Yongzhou	6	2	0	Intimidation, Propaganda, Denial
08-05-14-Journalists-Gao Yu	2	0	0	Guilt, Anti-China
13-05-14-Journalists-Xiang Nanfu	8	1	0	Intimidation, Anti-China
31-05-14-Church of the Almighty God-Zhang Lidong	1	0	0	Guilt
25-06-14-Uighur terror-Mirzat	1	0	0	Guilt
26-06-14-Drugs-Ning Caishen	1	1	0	Propaganda
29-06-14-Drugs-Zhang Yuan	0	2	0	Propaganda
04-08-14-Internet-Guo	1	0	4	Smear

Meimei				
19-08-14-Drugs-Ko-Chen-tung	3	1	0	Intimidation
27-08-14-Uighur terror-Nurmemet Abidilimit	0	0	0	Guilt
26-09-14-Internet-Wang Xin	0	2	0	Propaganda
26-09-14-Ilham Tohti-3 students	-	-	5	Smear, Denial
29-09-14-Journalists-Shen Hao	0	0	1	Guilt
21-11-14-Journalists-Shen Hao	5	2	3	Intimidation, propaganda, Smear
22-06-15-HR Lawyers-Zhai-Liu	5	2	2	Intimidation, Propaganda
12-07-15-HR Lawyers-3 lawyers	-	-	5	Smear
19-07-15-HR lawyers-Zhou Shifeng	2	0	11	Smear
19-07-15-Uighur terror-Tursan	0	0	0	Guilt
20-07-15-Uighur terror-Ai Ke Abai Er	2	2	0	Propaganda
31-08-15-Journalists-Wang Xiaolu	4	1	0	Intimidation, Anti-China
17-10-15-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu	2	1	4	Smear, Propaganda Denial, Anti-China
26-11-15-Journalists-Jiang Yefei	3	1	1	Intimidation
17-01-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai	2	1	0	Guilt, Denial

19-01-16-HR Lawyers-Peter Dahlin	4	1	4	Intimidation, Propaganda, Smear, Anti-China, Denial
01-02-16-Ponzi scheme-Ding Ning	1	0	5	Smear
25-02-16-HR Lawyers-Zhang Kai	8	3	5	Intimidation, Propaganda, Smear, Anti-China
28-02-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai	1	0	4	Smear, Denial
15-04-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Jian-Xu	5	0	0	Intimidation
02-05-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Lin-Xu	0	1	0	Propaganda
15-05-16-Ponzi scheme-Xu Qin	1	0	0	Guilt
21-06-16-Wukan village chief-Lin Zuluán	3	0	0	Intimidation, Denial
06-07-16-HK Booksellers-Lam Wing-kee	4	1	1	Intimidation, Denial
01-08-16-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu	3	1	3	Intimidation, Propaganda, Smear, Anti-China, Denial

This gave four main types – Intimidation, Smear, Propaganda and Guilt. There were also four hybrid types: Intimidation-Smear, Intimidation-Propaganda, Smear-Propaganda and Intimidation-Smear-Propaganda (Please see Figure 3-10 for a distribution using a Venn diagram). All seven types could also be labelled anti-China or Denial.

Figure 3-10: Distribution of confession events by type



Key: Blue circle = Denial; red circle = Anti-China

A quick comparison of the proportions of the different types show that Intimidation (nine, or 22.5%) and Guilt (10, or 25%) are the two most common types. The rest were distributed as follows: Propaganda (six, or 15%), Smear (six, or 15%), Intimidation-Propaganda (three, or 7.5%), Intimidation-Smear-Propaganda (four, or 10%), Smear-Propaganda (one, or 2.5%) and Intimidation-Smear (one, or 2.5%).

All confession events have aspects of all types (except Smear) associated with them – the broadcasts are inherently shameful for the confessors whatever kind of broadcasts they are, they are made to look guilty, they are acts of submission, and by state TVs very remit, also messages of propaganda. The thematic scores and typology only indicate how the content of the confessions suggests the most likely

intention/effect of the confession event. Table 3-6 below outlines the main types of confession event in this study.

Table 3-6 Types of confession events by thematic score, audience and goal

Type	Thematic score	Audience	Goal
Smear (including moral, professional or anti-China accusations)	Smear score ≥ 2 , supporting confessors ≥ 1	General public	To destroy support for the target; more likely when the target is popular/well-liked. Destroys someone's character.
Propaganda	Propaganda score ≥ 2 (≥ 1 if includes propaganda)	General public	Often paired with a crackdown (anti-drugs, anti-online rumours, Uighur violence)
Intimidation	Shame score ≥ 3	Community connected to target	Convince others not to do the same (mostly journalists, lawyers) – killing the chicken to scare the monkey
Guilt ⁴⁸	By default, if shame, smear, propaganda scores low. Confession usually details how crime was done.	General public	To show the government and the police are in charge, taking care of crime (legitimacy, public interest news)

⁴⁸ “They feed into a narrative that the party is cleansing itself and broader society of wrongdoers, thereby burnishing its own legitimacy as the ultimate arbiter of model social behaviour”. Please see Browne, A. (2016, February 2). Self-Criticism Makes a Comeback in Xi Jinping’s China. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/self-criticism-makes-a-comeback-in-xis-china-1454402688>

High hard guilt scores (≥ 2) were only associated with Intimidation and Guilt confession events: Dong Rubin (Bloggers), Zhang Lidong (Church of the Almighty God), Nurmemet Abidilimit (Uighur Terror), Wang Xin (Internet), Jiang Yefei (Journalists) and Ding Ning (Ponzi scheme). High soft guilt scores (≥ 4) were also associated with mostly Intimidation and Guilt confession events: (Lierchaisi (Bloggers), Charles Xue (Bloggers), Dong Liangjie (Bloggers), Dong Rubin (Bloggers), Chen Yongzhou (Journalists), Gao Yu (Journalists), Xiang Nanfu (Journalists), Wang Xin (Internet), Shen Hao (Journalists), and Mr Jian (Taiwan Telecom Fraud)).

Interestingly, Intimidation confessions fit into two models – one with high guilt scores and ones with zero or near zero guilt scores. This is part of the pattern of jailhouse versus neutral location described earlier in this chapter. Table 3-7 below shows guilt scores and type for each Intimidation confession event.

Table 3-7 Confession events by guilt score, type

Reference (Intimidation confessions)	Hard guilt score	Soft guilt score	Type
22-08-13-Bloggers-Qin-Lier	1	4	Jailhouse
27-08-13-GSK-Peter Humphrey	0	4	Jailhouse
29-08-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue	0	2	Jailhouse
15-09-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue	1	4	Jailhouse
26-10-13-Journalists-Chen Yongzhou	1	5	Jailhouse
13-05-14-Journalists-Xiang Nanfu	0	4	Jailhouse
19-08-14-Drugs-Ko-Chen-tung	0	2	Jailhouse
21-11-14-Journalists-Shen Hao	0	5	Jailhouse
22-06-15-HR Lawyers-Zhai-Liu	0	3	Jailhouse
31-08-15-Journalists-Wang	0	0	Neutral

Xiaolu			
26-11-15-Journalists-Jiang Yefei	2	3	Jailhouse
19-01-16-HR Lawyers-Peter Dahlin	0	0	Neutral
25-02-16-HR Lawyers-Zhang Kai	0	1	Neutral
15-04-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Jian-Xu	0	4	Jailhouse
21-06-16-Wukan village chief- Lin Zuluán	0	1	Neutral
06-07-16-HK Booksellers-Lam Wing-kee	0	1	Neutral
01-08-16-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu	0	0	Neutral

Discrepancies and other problems

During the course of data collection and analysis, a number of discrepancies with the confession events emerged: the story changing between confessions and between confession and trial, crude editing errors, the later retraction of the confession, and the use of confessions to attack off-screen targets. All these were in addition to the reported extra-legal transgressions such as no or restricted access to a lawyer, torture, and kidnapping.

Changing stories

These ranged from small – differing amounts of money for bribes or pay-offs – to the stunningly large – complete changes in crime accused between multiple confessions and between the confession and the trial. Several examples are provided in Table 3-8 below.

Table 3-8 Discrepancies in crime, testimony

Name	Discrepancy
Chen Yongzhou	In his October 2013 televised confession, Chen said he had accepted one of several payments to print negative stories about construction company Zoomlion, one of which was 500,000 yuan. During his trial, however, he was only accused of accepting bribes of 30,000 yuan in total. ⁴⁹
Shen Hao	In Shen Hao's first televised confession in September 2014, he explains how he asked his staff member Liu Dong to sign up 70% of companies planning an IPO. In the second November confession, Liu Dong said his "cooperation rate" was 75%.
Charles Xue	In his first August 2013 televised confession, Charles Xue is alleged to have taken prostitutes and engaged in group sex. The next month, he confesses to forwarding Weibo posts irresponsibly and behaving like an "emperor."
Gui Minhai	In January 2016, Gui Minhai appeared on TV showing remorse for his involvement in a fatal hit-and-run back in China in 2003. A month later, he was on <i>Phoenix TV</i> confessing to selling banned books on the mainland.

This study also collected data on whether the accused crime at trial was the same as the one confessed to in the broadcast. Of the 38 main confessors there were: five cases where the crime had changed; 11 where the crime was the same; nine were released on bail or without charge; and there were 11 don't knows (either because information was not released or the case had not yet gone to trial). Some 13% of the cases were tried on different charges and another 24% did not even go to trial.

Suspicious editing

There were many examples of crude editing, which could be interpreted (and was the case in at least one broadcast as confirmed through an interview, TC02) as

⁴⁹ The confession script was compared with Chinese journalist jailed for defamation after writing exposés on state firm Zoomlion (2014, October 17), South China Morning Post. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1618412/chinese-journalist-jailed-defamation-after-writing-exposes-state-firm>

efforts to cut and paste a “confession” and to take the confessor’s words out of context.

The editing was frequently jumpy – with sentences stitched together – and there were also examples of the police or journalist asking a question and the confessor giving different answers in different broadcasts (eg. between CCTV13 and CCTV9) – indicating that at least sometimes the tapes were doctored (although in the case of CCTV9, this appeared to be due to incompetence and translation issues).

There were other examples where confession footage was presented as “one interview” but it was clear from the appearance of the confessor (clothing and hairstyle, for example) that they were taken on separate occasions. During Gui Minhai’s January 2016 confession the colour of his t-shirt changed from grey to black in different shots as did the appearance of his hair.⁵⁰ Old footage was also used and presented as new footage (for example Shen Hao’s November confession is spliced with footage from his September confession).

Retracted confessions

Of the 38 main confessors, six of them have since publicly retracted their confession either through holding a press conference (Lam Wing-kee), talking with the media (Peter Humphrey and Peter Dahlin), through messages on their social media (Zhang Kai), or through their lawyer (Gao Yu and Lin Zuluang). All of them said they had been forced to make the confession either through threats (Gao Yu told a pre-trial hearing she gave the confession to protect her son)⁵¹ or with the promise of more lenient treatment.

Off-screen targets

There were several examples where confessions were focused on off-screen targets. This was something never seen with low political score confessions. Using main and supporting confessors to inform on or criticize others appears to be a clumsy

⁵⁰ Huang, Z. (2016, January 18). Chinese citizens don’t believe Hong Kong bookseller Gui Minhai’s public confession either. *Quartz*. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/596565/chinese-citizens-are-questioning-hong-kong-bookseller-gui-minhais-public-confession/>

⁵¹ Hatton, C. (2014, November 20). Chinese journalist Gao Yu faces trial for leaking state secrets. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-30125635>

way of making them into “mouthpieces” of the government to discredit others. Table 3-9 below lists those “mouthpiece” confessions identified in this study.

Table 3-9 ‘Mouthpiece’ confessions

Name	Date	Off-screen target
Charles Xue	15 September 2013	Lier Chaisi
Ilham Tohti’s students	26 September 2014	Ilham Tohti
Human Rights Lawyers	June, July 2015	Wang Yu, Zhou Shifeng, Wu Gan
Peter Dahlin	19 January 2016	Su Changlan (蘇昌蘭), Xing Qingxian (幸清賢), Wang Quanzhang (王全 璋)
Wang Yu	1 August 2016	Zhou Shifeng



Chapter 4: Scripted and staged

China's televised confessions are routinely staged, scripted and coerced based on testimony from interviewees who had appeared in broadcasts. They were told lenient treatment or early release was more likely if they cooperated. Sometimes they were not told the recording would be broadcast on national television; they only found out when they came face-to-face with the CCTV news crew. Confessions were choreographed as if they were a TV drama with a "director," "script," "costumes," and "retake after retake" until the "director" was satisfied. Conditions in detention were inhumane – and included solitary confinement, 24-hour lights, sleep deprivation and drugs. These stresses and the extreme power asymmetry added to the pressure to make a confession. In some cases, the video was deceptively edited. Most agree that they are illegal and part of a propaganda and intimidation program directly or indirectly ordered by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General-Secretary Xi Jinping. Some argue this is sometimes exploited lower down the power structure to wage personal vendettas. Some activists, while shaken by the use of detainees to denigrate their friends and colleagues in the aired confession, are sharing notes and trying to find ways to fight back by making their own pre-detention videos and employing avoidance techniques during interrogations.

The interviewees

In total, nine interviews were conducted, including three people who had made televised confessions (TC01 – 03), one journalist who had been detained but refused to make a televised confession (JO02), two lawyers who had made video confessions that were not broadcast (LA01-02), one Chinese legal scholar with personal experience of being detained on the mainland (LA03), one Chinese journalist with experience of being detained on the mainland (JO03), and one Chinese journalist who reports on the detained human rights lawyers and their families (JA01). Further, this study also used anonymous testimonies by two Chinese people who had made recorded confessions, one that had been broadcast and one that had not. The male pronoun is used with all interviewees to maintain their anonymity but they were not necessarily male.

Themes

Six themes were identified from the interviews: the mechanics of the confessions; their legality; their effect: their purpose; who is responsible; and the response of the human rights community. Themes are divided into sub-themes.

The mechanics of the confessions

Reasons why the suspect agrees

The most common reason given for agreeing to make a videoed confession was the promise of release or lenient treatment being more likely. The authorities – whether officers from domestic or state security – almost always framed it as a recording they wanted to give their “superiors” or “bosses” (領導人) to show that the suspect was cooperating, and indicated that in return they may get early release or lenient treatment. TC01, who suffers from a disease that could have put him in a coma, said he felt if he complied he would be released sooner and his release would also likely mean they would also release a close friend. “Every day counted in terms of health reasons. I was already losing weight quite quickly and with my medical condition that could quickly offset something.” One of the anonymous testimonies wrote that officers told them: “No video, no release.” LA01, who is quite headstrong, said his interrogators said he might get an early release if he agreed. In the early weeks of his detention, he refused because he knew lawyer Liu Jianjun (see confession event 22-06-15-HR Lawyers-Zhai-Liu) was still detained even though he gave a confession back in June. LA01 said he began to trust the police once his treatment improved – he was moved from a crowded cell in a run-down detention centre to his own private room, albeit under 24-hour guard, in a military hotel, with better food. He had also learned a close family member had been allowed to leave the country and so he decided he would agree to give a recorded confession. TC02’s situation was slightly different; he was asked if he would agree to “meet the press.” He said yes – on the condition that it was not filmed, a request he said he put in writing and signed – because he thought it might help his case if he appeared to be cooperative and that the media exposure could protect him in some way.

Other interviewees (LA02 and LA03) suggested that threats of action against family members are likely also used to extract televised confessions, such as is

reported to have happened with lawyer Wang Yu and journalist Gao Yu. Sometimes the suspect is tortured. “I think many of these if not all of these defendants were forced to give the TV confessions. They don't have any choice and in many cases these people were severely tortured before giving these confessions.” (LA03). Lam Wing-kee in his testimony wrote that he made his confessions because he couldn't *not* make them – “I wasn't interviewed I was ‘being’ interviewed.” The point is, in detention, all the power is in the hands of the police or state security. “I was in a state of fear.”⁵²

Many confessions are taped but not broadcast

It seems to be routine that confessions are videoed but not broadcast. LA02 made two police videos that were not aired; LA01's video confession was also not shown, but he had asked for it to remain private. Even those whose confessions were screened said they had made multiple tapes – TC01 had made three while TC03 said he had made about a dozen.

The police/state security commonly lied about the recording

Interviewees said the police deceived them about how the confession would be used or how it would be made. TC01 was told only “judges” would view the video to decide whether to release him or prosecute him. He only realised it was going out on TV when he walked into the room and came face-to-face with CCTV cameras and a female journalist. TC02 insisted beforehand – and put it in writing – that he would only talk to print journalists. “They lied to me,” he said. “I was ambushed.” He was given a tranquilizer the morning of the shoot (normally he was only given one in the evening). The drug made him foggy headed.

LA02 said that twice during interrogations the police said the room's surveillance camera was broken so they set up a DV camera on the table. He said he joked with the police that they just wanted a better angle for the televised confession they were making. The tapes were never televised, but LA02 said that was probably

⁵² Full, complete transcript of returned bookseller Lam Wing-kee's press conference and Q&A (2016, June 20, *Hong Kong Free Press*. Retrieved from <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2016/06/20/full-complete-transcript-of-returned-bookseller-lam-wing-kees-press-conference-and-qa/>

because he didn't say anything worth airing. His reaction indicates that the making of a televised confession, with or without the suspect's agreement, has now become an expectation, it's almost become institutionalized.

Suspects get in 'costume' for the filming

Before his confession, TC01 was told to shower and put on civilian clothes (his normal attire were grey sweatpants and a bright yellow prison vest). TC03 said his interrogator gave him civilian clothes to wear for the recording; he also wore "cement-coloured" sweat pants and an orange vest during his detention. TC02 was given a new prison vest to wear "to replace the shitty one I was wearing" as he was led to "meet the press". One of the anonymous testifiers wrote that he was told to shower first and then put on civilian clothes.

The script

The content of the confessions in most cases was usually based on the final "confession statement" hammered out during multiple interrogations between the suspect and the authorities. Suspects were routinely told to memorise the "script" – in one case to copy it out by hand to help remember it, and when that failed to read it from a piece of paper held off-screen. For example, TC01 was handed a photocopied Q&A based on the content of his deposition and told to memorise it the day before the shoot. TC03's script, which he was also asked to commit to memory, was based on his written confession and statement of repentance. TC02 did not have a script to memorize, but his interrogators told him he should express repentance, apologize to the CCP and confess.

There was variation in how much leeway the suspect had over the wording. LA01 said he tried to slip in phrases such as "I didn't intend to do" the alleged crime, but his interrogators stopped him. TC01 was able to wrestle some concessions over calling named individuals, criminals, but several were not allowed to make any changes to the script; they had to read it "word for word."

The confession is heavily directed

If the media are involved in the filming, they play only a token role in the confessions. Several said it was their interrogators who asked the questions (TC02, TC03, anonymous testimony) and not the journalist. In TC01's case, the journalist asked the questions but the police gave her a list to read from – in fact she was not in shot or heard during the broadcast footage.

Multiple retakes were often needed (TC01, TC03, LA01, anonymous testimony) until the police or state security said they were satisfied. TC01 needed four takes to say one propagandistic sentence. LA01 made 10 retakes. "They reviewed it carefully every time until they were satisfied."

It wasn't only the script, but the confessors were also told how to speak and how to sit (TC01, anonymous testimony). TC01 was told to look serious and speak slowly. LA01 was told to look natural and not as if he was reading from a script.

TC03 described how in one of the dozen recording sessions he made, the setting was made to look like a court house with his main interrogator as the judge, his assistant was the deputy judge and a policewoman – whom TC03 said he had never seen before – changed into plainclothes and was a "witness."

Footage is often deceptively edited

The recording sessions lasted much longer than the footage shown on television. TC01 said his took 90 minutes, whereas he appears on TV for no longer than a minute. One of the anonymous testifiers recounted how it took seven hours to film their minute or so on camera. TC02 remembers the experience as lasting about 20 minutes, yet he said just two sentences on camera. He believes his was so short because he said little they could use as he tried to avoid incriminating himself.

The worst transgression of deceptive editing occurred in TC02's case. The footage on national television is a close up of his head and shoulders, but in reality he was handcuffed, locked into a chair and sitting in a locked cage. The cameras poked through the bars of the cage, so that his real physical situation was not revealed in the shot. The questions came from one of his interrogators who sat on a podium behind the film crew. TC02 also insists he was very careful to preface everything he said with conditionals, so that he did not confess or incriminate himself. He believes his confession was edited to remove words such as "if" to make it look like he confessed

on television. TC02 said he never confessed, before, during or after his trial and he was denied important medical tests as punishment.

Conditions are stressful in detention, pushing suspects towards confessing

Suspects are often sleep deprived (TC01, TC02, TC03, LA01, and JO02). Both detention centres and residential surveillance had bright lights 24 hours a day. Often suspects would be interrogated for hours when they were exhausted from lack of sleep (JO02). Those kept in residential surveillance are also subjected to solitary confinement. Lam Wing-kee described how his detention in solitary confinement made him consider suicide.

For TC02, the interrogation session was extreme. Just as in his confession each time he was locked into an iron chair, with a lock bar across his lap, his hands also handcuffed, inside a cage, with the cage locked.

Threats were also routine.

“While I was detained, I underwent a lot of ‘brainwashing’ types of questioning and sent for interrogation more than 70 times. They would take it in turns to interrogate me; mainly this took the form of mental torture and interrogating me when I was exhausted. They threatened me that if I did not cooperate with them, they would sentence me to jail time, I’d lose my job, my family would leave me, I’d be ruined for the rest of my life. I was only 39 years old, my hair turned white with the enormous pressure and torture of it all.” (JO02)

There was also no or restricted access to lawyers. Any suspect who is accused or is being investigated for crimes of state security are not allowed to hire a lawyer. TC02 had seen a lawyer a couple of times before the confession but not in the two to three weeks before the actual day of filming so he could not consult with them about “meeting the press.” He said police would intentionally block him for full day interrogations to prevent his lawyer from seeing him. The interrogations, however, would just last a few hours in the afternoon.

The legality of the confessions

There was general agreement that the televised confessions were illegal in China, but with the absence of any specific regulations, some said this meant there was an ambiguity in the law (LA01). “In China, confession is king... they are the worst flaw in the Chinese legal system.”

LA03 argued that because they violate the presumption of innocence that *is* in Chinese criminal procedure law, then they are illegal. Furthermore, because they are known to be accompanied by many other extra-legal behaviours – including kidnapping, enforced disappearances, denial of access to lawyer and family visits, and torture – they are part of same illegal practices. Before the era of the televised confession, written confessions were used as evidence at trial, or the defendant would confess in the courtroom. Today, these TV confessions can be submitted as evidence and most Chinese lawyers “will not be brave enough to argue that the confession was coerced.” (LA03).

LA02 pointed out that their illegality is indicated by the fact that the eventual crime at trial for several of these suspects was different to the one in the confession. Further, several of the suspects were accused of crimes against the state – a measure used to justify stricter restrictions such as no access to a lawyer – yet journalists were free to film them and broadcast their words on television. “It’s a disgraceful practice.” (LA02).

The purposes of the confessions

Because the interviewees were drawn from the rights activist community then naturally they had much more to say about the confessions of their fellow activists. But there was a recognition that the confessions have different roles according to the case type. LA03 noted that for non-political crimes, the confession could be used to demonstrate to the public the government was sincere about cracking down on crime – for example, it was not shielding Ponzi scheme operators and corrupt officials. Some said they could also be a form of propaganda to achieve political aims such as legitimizing detentions, arrests or even court verdicts. For example, putting the confessions of Ilham Tohti’s students on air was about justifying the very harsh life sentence given to the moderate scholar because he had so many supporters in Xinjiang and in the international community (LA03). TC03 believed his broadcast

confessions were not only about informing on a colleague but also about showing people on the mainland and outside that China's detention of them was "lawful."

As Chinese people travel overseas and have access to more sources of news online, the Party is trying to wrest back control of the narrative, and these confessions are one – albeit small – part of that effort (LA02). They are a way for "the Party to silence other voices, to tell people how they should think about these cases."

Interviewees mostly agreed that the confessions of rights activists had several purposes. The first was intentionally destroying any public support for the detainee and their colleagues (JO02, JO03, and LA02). Second, efforts to get suspects to incriminate each other on camera are a deliberate attempt to destroy their support base in their own community. "This is having a huge effect because to a large extent this community relies on mutual support and encouragement to exist. Resistance against authoritarianism requires enormous courage and extracts a huge price, affirmation and support from their community is extremely important." (JO03). JO01 said that some people thought this "smear" aspect of the televised confessions was specially designed to stop suspects from becoming inspirational heroes in their community once they were released and this would stifle the rights movement. Third, it was an act of intimidation through the use of shame and fear. "These TV confessions are aimed at intimidating public intellectuals, to make everyone feel insecure, to censor themselves, and to never dare to say anything or do anything against the Party. It's a white horror." (JO02). Previous deterrence measures – detentions, beatings, jail terms – were not enough to stop rights activism, and so this is simply a new tool for the government (TC01 and LA03). LA03 also argued that forcing them to show repentance (悔罪) was "maximizing the humiliation."

Who is responsible for the confessions?

The consensus was that it is the Party, and ultimately Chinese President Xi Jinping, who are behind the emergence of these televised confessions, but if China is viewed as a fragmented authoritarian state,⁵³ it is also possible that another faction or

⁵³ Xi Jinping is a strongman. That does not mean he gets his way (2016, October 22), *The Economist*. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/news/china/21709005-changing-china-tough-even-man-xis-powers-xi-jinping-strongman-does-not>

power centre is behind these confessions. Respondents mostly thought that Xi is the likely source – direct or indirect – of these televised confessions because they coincided with his rise to power in 2012 and the accompanying wide-ranging clampdown on many sectors of society from human rights lawyers to academics, and bloggers to Party officials.

Xi is allied with the conservative left and they are bringing back the practices of Mao and expanding on them (JA03). “The TV confessions are not at all a new thing. Before people had TVs, the authorities would use struggle sessions, shame parades, public self-criticisms, including publishing written self criticisms in newspapers.” Social media and globalization have meant that the Party has to struggle to control the narrative and that this has encouraged them “to go back to the old methods” [of the Mao era] (LA02). LA03 believes that these originate right up to the Politburo (and ultimately Xi) because they are broadcast on CCTV, which is controlled by the Central Propaganda Bureau and also because they involve suspects arrested across the country.

TC02 too sees a link with Xi because he has overseen a stronger anti-foreigner crackdown but believes that his confession – and possibly others – were instigated by another power centre. In his case he believed he was targeted by an individual connected with his case who has good connections with both police and government officials. “Whenever you go down the pyramid of power... orders get abused by personal interests.”

The effects of the confessions

This section examines the effects of the confessions on two audiences – the rights community and the general public.

Those who disparage colleagues can be ostracized.

Forcing suspects to denounce each other on television means they lose the trust of their community, and if they are released soon after the confession the effect is even more pronounced (TC01). He described how one friend is still struggling from the loss of his reputation one year after his televised confession.

JO01 said the effect has been destabilizing and disruptive and the confessions have sparked a huge debate in the community over how to respond to those who confess and inform on others. Some people see them as traitors. “They betrayed our work. They betrayed other people.” The topic is so painful that people just don’t want to talk about it.

“I have sympathy, but it’s also very hard for me to work with them again because I know that when they are interrogated or caught they may say my name. So it’s very unlikely that I will work with them again.” (JO01)

LA02 took a different view. Although some confessions are betrayals the overall response from the community was “compassion and solidarity” because it is known that the confessions are coerced. For example, in the case of Wang Yu, her family (including her teenaged son) were held hostage by the authorities, so she was not criticized for her decision to give a 1 August confession (LA02).

Do the Chinese public believe them?

There was disagreement about whether Chinese people accept the televised confessions at face value. Many people in China are “brainwashed” and believe official propaganda and so the televised confessions of human rights activists has made them believe they are “enemies of the state.” (LA03). He referred to the comments left under online videos of these confessions and while some of them will be from 50 centers or *wu mao* (online commentators paid to spread the views of the Party, so called because they are said to be paid 50 cents for each post), some of them are just members of the public. People believe them because confessions are an ingrained part of Chinese culture and have been around since imperial times (JO01 and JO03). “It’s kind of in their [leaders’] genes” (JO01). The act of confessing translates naturally to guilt. “They would wonder why you would make the confession in the first place if you were innocent.” (LA01)

The older generation are more likely to believe these confessions because they were “brainwashed” by the Party when they grew up (JO02). “They believe the Party is right and those who have been arrested are bad people.” Although there is widespread understanding that the system is problematic and corrupt that won’t affect

how they view these confessions (JO01). Conditions today are so much better than during the Mao era and so they also “won’t connect” them with the Cultural Revolution era self-criticisms (JO01). Only people in the community (for example the human rights lawyers) know that these confessions are coerced and untrue (LA02).

A few of the interviewees were not so sure people believed them. They are effective in stirring up nationalist sentiment but people aren’t really that interested and they get their news from different sources other than CCTV (TC01). Some people were starting not to believe them because of well-publicised miscarriages of justice and official cover-ups – for example the case of Lei Yang⁵⁴ – and the spread of social media has emerged as an alternative channel for people to get their information (LA02).

JO03 said he thought the government didn’t care whether the public believed them or not – the point was to show the suspects had been broken – so the words in the confession are not important.

Response and survival mechanisms

Some believe it is a trick and refuse to confess on camera

The example of Qin Huohuo⁵⁵ taught JO02 that agreeing to make a confession would not necessarily translate into an early release and this is one reason why he refused to make one even though he was pressured to do so throughout his year of detention. Since all interrogations are filmed by law in China and the footage can be edited into a aired confession – JO02 said he would deliberately respond to his interrogators’ questions with his own questions so the material was rendered unusable.

⁵⁴ Lei Yang’s case attracted a huge public outcry and accusations of police brutality and a cover up after he died in police custody in May 2016. The police said he died of a heart attack, but Lei’s young age (he was 29) and the fact his body was bruised made the family suspicious and they demanded an investigation; the news erupted across social media. Please see Buckley, C. & Wu, A. (2016, December 23). No Trial for Beijing Officers Over Death of Environmentalist. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/23/world/asia/china-lei-yang-police.html>

⁵⁵ Qin Huohuo made a televised confession shortly after his detention in August 2013. He was never released and instead, sentenced in April the following year to three years in jail. Qin is a main confessor in the data in this research. (Please see Appendix I)

LA01, too, was initially unwilling to make a televised confession because he had seen lawyer Liu Jianjun⁵⁶ confess on CCTV the previous month but he had not been released. Later, when he finally agreed to record a confession, LA01 said he used his legal knowledge to ensure that he worded it in such a way that if the police tricked him and did not release him he would be able to retract his confession at trial.

The human rights community is evolving coping mechanisms

While the televised confessions have shaken the rights community, and intimidated people, LA03 believes that it will survive because these people believe in what they are fighting for (rule of law, democracy and human rights). They may lie low for a few years, but they will come back and their resolve will be even stronger.

There are practical things that members of the community are doing to protect themselves, such as recording videoed statements saying that if they make a televised confession in the future, it is because they have been tortured or threatened (TC01). These videos can be released if the individual is detained and makes a broadcast confession. TC01 believes the power to intimidate using televised confessions is gradually weakening, but it will be some time before the government will stop using them.

⁵⁶ Liu Jianjun is a main confessor and supporting confessor in this study (appearing in two televised confessions in June and July 2015. A year later he was eventually released on bail, but at the time of LA01's detention he was still not free. (Please see Appendix I).

Chapter 5: Propaganda and punishment

In some ways this study was trying to prove the obvious – China’s televised confessions, although they are presented as straightforward news pieces inside China, are widely understood, at least in the overseas community, to be choreographed and staged by the authorities for use as propaganda or punishment. The aim of this study was to take testimony from those who had made confessions and those who had knowledge and experience of China’s legal system and human rights situation and examine data from the confession broadcasts themselves to find out *how* these confessions are made and use that knowledge to understand *why* they are being made.

There is strong evidence that most if not all of China’s televised confessions are “show” confessions from the testimony of the interviewees in this study. Suspects are asked to memorise “lines”, get dressed up and play the role of a “confessor” in front of the cameras. Threats and lies are routinely used to get suspects to take part. Data from the broadcasts indicates that deliberate efforts are made to shame the confessor, emphasize their guilt through self incrimination and using footage of them looking like convicted prisoners even though they have not yet been tried in a court of law. Some confessions are used to incriminate and denigrate others. The types of confessions found in this study – Intimidation, Smear, Propaganda and Guilt – are strong indications that the televised confessions are being used as a show of state power and a tool to intimidate activists, to destroy trust within the activist community, persuade the Chinese public that activists and what they do is anti-China and/or criminal, deter people from “undesirable” behaviour (such as taking drugs or forwarding Weibo posts) and to drum up support for the CCP and its actions. A subset of confessions, which this study calls Denial confessions, appear to be aimed at responding to criticisms of China, largely from overseas and usually connected with the detention of the suspect or a related case. It is possible for a confession to have multiple roles.

Who is behind these televised confessions?

The broadcast data and interviewees point to the top levels of the Party being the source of these confessions, rather than alternative power bases.

First, there is the timing. These televised confessions did not emerge in isolation; at the same time Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi

Jinping was reviving public self-criticism sessions with top officials⁵⁷ and China was also airing the self confessions of CCP officials nabbed for corruption. This study's televised confessions fit neatly into Xi's bold new changes. This study did not compare the confessions of corrupt officials with the televised confessions of suspects (which certainly warrants further study), but eyeballing *Always on the Road* (永遠在路上), an eight-part TV series aired in 2016 and featuring the officials' confessions and a joint production by CCTV and the CCP's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection,⁵⁸ revealed some startling similarities. While *Always on the Road* is flashier with post-production effects and music, there are parallels with the televised confessions in this study – they both feature the police walk, the confession signing, a conversation with an invisible journalist and repentant crying. Their confessions focus on introspective self-criticisms, statements of regret and apologies to the CCP – which were on display with some of the high political score suspects in this study also. At least, superficially, they appear to be part of the same “package”.

Second, the main medium for the televised confessions, state broadcaster CCTV, is controlled by the CCP's Central Propaganda Bureau. It would be difficult for an alternative faction to control a top central body and also over a long period of time (this study spans four years) and across the breadth of the country – from Xinjiang to Guangdong and involve a diverse range of suspects from rights lawyers to Taiwanese fraud suspects to minor celebrities. This is especially true for those confessions broadcast on the daily news show, *Xinwenlianbo* (XWLB). The majority were based in Beijing, right on Xi's doorstep, another factor that speaks to central control for these confessions. Domestic media are ordered to only carry Xinhua copy in reporting these confessions and there are directives from the Central Propaganda Bureau that control coverage too,⁵⁹ both indications that the confessions are centrally directed.

⁵⁷ Roberts, D. (2013, October 4). Xi Jinping is no fun: China's Xi Jinping revives self-criticism sessions: Rolex watches and pricey Moutai are out. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-10-03/china-president-xi-jinping-revives-self-criticism-sessions-in-maoism-lite>

⁵⁸ Li, E. (2016, October 18). Disgraced Chinese officials confess to crimes on television. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2029187/disgraced-chinese-officials-confess-crimes-television>

⁵⁹ For example, following the first televised confession of journalist Shen Hao in September 2014, China Digital Times published leaked censorship information banning any media outlet from reporting positively on his case.

Third, several of the confessions coincide with national crackdowns such as an anti-drug program, the 709 Crackdown, and the 2013 regulation to stop online rumour spreading. These are all centrally-led programs; some of the confessions can be seen to be working in tandem with these. Many of these cases are in alignment with the top levels of the CCP's policy direction. For example, in early 2017, the Supreme People's Court said that the successful prosecution of rights activists, including Zhou Shifeng, was one of its top successes of the previous year.⁶⁰

Four, the interviewees were almost unanimous in arguing that Xi is behind these confessions (LA03, JO02, and JO03). They see the fact these televised confessions coincided with Xi's emergence as CCP General Secretary (in 2012) as no coincidence. They also argue he is allied with the conservative left and has brought back other Mao-era style techniques.

However, there is some evidence of exploitation at the local level. TC02 believes that a person with very good connections with the government and police and involved with his case engineered his confession and his harsh treatment pre and post trial. It is possible that within the framework of these confessions – ordered from the top – that they are exploited for personal reasons or to settle local scores lower down the chain of authority on an ad hoc basis. There are other examples, apart from TC02's that are possible contenders: for example, journalist Chen Yongzhou (陳永洲) in Guangzhou was targeted for critical stories about Zoomlion (a powerful Hunan-based partially state-owned company). His case was overseen in Changsha (Hunan's provincial capital) even though his paper and himself were based in Guangdong.

It seems therefore, that these confessions are almost certainly directed from the top, but a few individual cases could be a result of outside actors working within the system, to further their own interests. If true for some of these, we would not expect them to be broadcast on XWLB (both TC02's and Chen Yongzhou's were not).

See Minitrue: Poem to Shen Hao (2014, September 27), *China Digital Times*. Retrieved from <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2014/09/minitrue-poem-shen-hao/>

⁶⁰ China's top court lists jailing rights activists as its biggest achievement (2017, March 12), *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2078167/chinas-top-courts-list-jailing-rights-activists-their>

How are the suspects chosen?

The sample of 40 confession events in this study was weighted very heavily towards cases with higher political scores. This could be a factor of greater media attention making them easier to identify, but it is still likely that the majority of televised confessions do have higher political scores, because they have greater propaganda value. If that is true, then who makes a confession could simply be related to the suspect's political usefulness – for example in intimidating a sector of society or encouraging support for a government crackdown or a new measure.

In confessions that are linked to a crackdown, the authorities may decide that one or more suspects connected to the issue may be useful to put on TV. But how do they decide exactly who to choose? For example in the anti-drugs crackdown, clearly celebrities have propaganda value – but which celebrities should be made to go on air? It wouldn't look good to put A-list stars on CCTV because their star status would overwhelm the propaganda message; their plight could arouse sympathy from the public and thus a backlash against televised confessions. It's also possible that the celebrity may have connections with the police to protect them from this kind of public humiliation. Actor Jaycee Chan, the son of famous kung fu star Jackie Chan, was not made to appear on television to confess when he was caught in the summer of 2014 with 100g of marijuana in his flat. But his friend, Taiwanese actor, Ko Chen-tung (柯震東), detained at the same time for the lesser charge of taking the drug, appeared on TV, in a prison vest, sobbing his shame. Jaycee Chan's father, Jackie Chan is known to have close ties with the Party, and it is possible that he acted to save his son from the humiliating experience.

The crackdown against bloggers in 2013 is another example. In the autumn of 2013, Charles Xue (薛必群) and online environmental activist, Dong Liangjie (董良傑) were put on TV. It was widely seen as an attack on Weibo's big V's (verified accounts where the user typically has millions of followers). Charles Xue was a popular blogger with 12 million followers but he certainly wasn't the most famous, so why was he chosen? Pan Shiyi (潘石屹), with 16 million followers, gave an interview on CCTV in which he warned people to be responsible online, but he was never detained; he spoke as a free man. Ren Zhiqiang (任志強), who has very strong

connections at the centre of power,⁶¹ and an even bigger following of around 20 million, remained untouched and free to post his trademark outspoken comments, at least until 2016 when his account was deleted.

A suspect may not appear simply because they may refuse to record one, and the interrogation footage may not be deemed sufficiently incriminating or of good enough quality to use on air. In the case of the Human Rights Lawyers confessions, some of those detained were vilified on air but did not appear in a confession. This is thought to be because they refused to cooperate. In some cases, there is evidence of this, for example, activist Wu Gan (吳淦) who worked with Zhou Shifeng's (周世鋒) Fengrui Law Firm. In a statement released by his lawyer, Wu Gan said he had been blindfolded and taken to a place to "perform" in a TV confession but he refused to speak the lines prepared for him and instead pleaded with the journalist to tell the truth – that he had in fact been tortured.⁶² In a country with a free press, such footage would be headline news. In China, it would never be shown.

Lights, camera, infractions of justice

Since China's state media's stated role is the Party's long-standing propaganda outlet, it is clear that most if not all of these confessions are coerced for a purpose, quite separate from that of public interest or justice. This study has revealed the great – and shocking – extent to which police and state security have gone to produce these televised confessions from asking suspects to memorize scripts to doing take after take for hours for a piece on camera that lasts little more than a minute. In 2008, China made it compulsory for all interrogations to be videoed (McConville & Pils, 2013) and the videoing of confession statements at the end of the day as a wrap-up of that day's interrogation is also routine (TC02). The only new development is

⁶¹ Timmons, H. (2013, October 9). At least one China big 'V' won't shut up – he's got an autobiography to flog. *Quartz*. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/133871/at-least-one-china-big-v-wont-shut-up-hes-got-an-autobiography-to-flog/>

⁶² Gan, W. (2017, March 24). Activist Who Rejected TV Confession Invites CCTV Interviewer to Be Witness at His Trial. *ChinaChange*. Retrieved from <https://chinachange.org/2017/03/24/activist-who-rejected-tv-confession-invites-cctv-interviewer-to-be-witness-at-his-trial/>

taking them out of the interrogation room and onto television sets across the country and online so their audience reaches around the world.

The ‘show’ confession

The interviewees provided the strongest evidence that these confessions are performances or “show” confessions. This study collected testimonies from six people who had made a videoed confession. The following are the common elements from the interviews or testimony obtained that provide evidence for their status as “show” confessions:

- **Confessions are scripted or heavily directed** by the police or state security: TC01, TC03, LA01 and one of the anonymous testifiers were all given a script to memorise; TC02 was not given a script, but he was told what to say.
- **Suspects are dressed for the camera:** TC01, TC03 and one of the anonymous testifiers, were all held in residential surveillance and swapped their prison-issued vests for civilian clothes; TC02 was given a new prison vest to replace his old one.
- **The filming is controlled by the authorities not the media:** TC01’s CCTV journalist read from a script given to her by state security; TC02 was filmed by the media, but questions were asked by his interrogator; TC03 and one of the anonymous testifiers had their questions read out by the interrogator.
- **The footage is shot again and again until the authorities are satisfied:** TC01 and one of the anonymous testifiers were told to speak slowly and act seriously; LA01 was told to look natural and not as if he was reading from a script; all interviewees except TC02 said they had to undergo retake after retake and even record extra supplementary footage; TC03 said he was filmed around a dozen times making a confession.

Some interviewees said they were promised lenient treatment provided they were cooperative. Testimony from lawyers of other suspects in detention reported in the media said that torture and threats to families of the suspects is also used to extract confessions. The authorities also concealed the fact that they will be appearing on TV – saying either the recording was just for their “superiors” to judge the case, or in the case of TC02 that there would be no cameras – only print journalists. This is likely

because they were concerned that the suspect would refuse if they knew beforehand it was going to be broadcast nationally.

The interviewees also said that videos are often shot but not broadcast. It's possible the lower levels of domestic and state security send them higher up the chain of control to show they are doing their job. The footage is also insurance if the suspect talks to media—after Lam Wing-kee's press conference in Hong Kong in June 2016 claiming his confessions had been coerced and his colleagues had been kidnapped by Chinese security, CCTV broadcast clips of his previous confessions.

It was not possible to interview all 38 main confessors, at least two have been executed, many are still in prison, many others are awaiting trial and many of those that have been released are unwilling to talk because it is too dangerous. While the sample is small, it does cover foreigners, Hong Kongers, and mainland Chinese and it spans the years 2013, 2015 and 2016. They also cover a range of political scores; suspects held in detention centres and those in residential surveillance; those held by domestic security and state security; and in several regions across the country. Their similarities are startling, and while we cannot conclude that all televised confessions follow the same format it is very likely that many of them do.

The broadcast data also provided compelling evidence that these confessions were staged. Several of the confessors made multiple appearances (Charles Xue, Shen Hao (沉灝))—sometimes for different crimes, and sometimes taking different roles (main and supporting, for example Zhai Yanmin (翟岩民) and Liu Jianjun (劉建軍)). These repeated appearances indicate that the confessors are being “used” for a purpose; they are not simple confessions to camera – otherwise why would they need to appear more than once? The apparent use of main and supporting confessors evident in the broadcasts is also an indication that these suspects have different roles to “play,” and can be paralleled with main and supporting actors in a drama. Main confessors were identified as being the focus of the news report (their name in the headline, or mentioned in the first minute of the news package and/or being the focus of the package). They tended to have a higher soft guilt score (being shown signing a confession, frog-marched by police, etc.) and scored high on shame (self-criticism, regret and mercy); while supporting confessors often had their identity concealed, tended to score lower on soft guilt and devoted their confession to informing and criticizing the main confessor and/or an off-screen target. This was a pattern seen

across all four years and indicates again that these are “produced” by the authorities for a purpose. Five confession broadcasts (all with higher political scores) were identified as “mouthpiece confessions” – that is the suspects’ confessions are used to incriminate or criticize an off-screen target (another detained suspect or prisoner). More effort is made to show main confessors as guilty than is made with the supporting confessors. Soft guilt categories are associated with images of legal procedure rather than the more humiliating symbols of shaved head, having hands clamped to a table or being put in a cage/behind bars (hard guilt).

Further evidence that these broadcasts are not simply confessions can be found in a number of inconsistencies and other problems ranging from the facts about the alleged crime or the alleged crime itself changing between repeat confessions or the confession and the trial. Deceptive editing was also an issue – for example testimony is presented as a single recording event but the suspect is wearing different clothes in different shots, jerky editing of the confession or a mismatch between the question from the journalist or police officer and the answer of the suspect. Even more damning is that six of the 38 main confessors have retracted their confessions. Another issue was the lack of facts about the crime for several of the political confessions – they were either just a confession and a statement of regret (Gao Yu (高瑜), Peter Humphrey) or non-specific and more about undesirable or unprofessional behaviour rather than a specific crime. It may be that the suspects are unwilling to confess to the alleged crime so whatever the authorities can get the suspect to say will be used. In other cases, it could be because the crime involved a sensitive matter that the Party did not want to be made public. For example, in the case of Gao Yu, it is likely that they did not want to specify the details of the crime because Document No. 9 was secret at the time.

From punishment to propaganda

The confession data offered clues as to why these televised confessions were broadcast. First, in this study’s sample of 40 confession events, 75 different confessors, and 38 main confessors – an unusually high proportion of main confessors were released (24%) without going to trial. Some 29% of the main confessors were not from the mainland, and 9% were Uighur. These ratios are skewed compared with prison statistics. Are non-mainlanders more likely to want to confess, or more willing to agree to confess? What is more feasible is that suspects from outside the mainland

are more newsworthy and have greater propaganda value – they play into the nationalist rubric of enhancing legitimacy. The relatively high proportion of Uighur suspects is likely connected to the use of these confessions for propaganda purposes in the country’s long-running crackdown against “separatism”. Another indication of purpose are “crackdown confessions,” confessions that occur in batches coinciding with a well-publicised crackdown – which again points to propaganda and intimidation value.

This study also found evidence of “pairs” of confessions: higher political scores versus low political scores, jailhouse versus neutral location, main versus supporting, precise versus vague crimes, normal versus denial – patterns that also indicated that different motives were at play. Over 75% of the confession events had a higher political score. This significantly larger share for politically-sensitive confessions could be a function of these having greater news value and so more likely to be identified in this study. It could also be true that there are indeed more politically-sensitive confession events broadcast because they better fit the purpose of these televised confessions (Intimidation and Smear). This cannot be determined without a more vigorous study of CCTV broadcasts to find possible “missing” confessions. However, the difference between these two types of confessions tells us a great deal about their possible uses. These differences are strong indications that televised confessions serve different purposes according to the political score otherwise we would have to assume that suspects with different political scores make very different confessions!) The fact that higher political score cases tended to have more supporting confessors meant that this data downplays the difference (supporting confessors score lower on shame and propaganda themes).

There was an obvious attempt to portray low political score suspects in a “guilty” setting (higher soft guilt scores). However, these results could be skewed because a large proportion of higher political score cases were human rights lawyers being held under residential surveillance and from the interviews we learned that while they normally wore prison gear in their “cells,” they were ordered to dress up as a “civilian” for the camera. It is possible that China is reacting to criticism in the first year of broadcasting from the international community – it taught China to be more cautious in how it portrayed politically-sensitive suspects, and an effort was made to show them as being treated well (civilian clothes are less shocking than prison clothing and handcuffs) to deflect criticism. This study split these two types into

“jailhouse” and “neutral” and it was noted that in all of the higher political score confessions, the main confessors appearing in neutral confessions were all detained but not yet charged.

The typology

The typology of broadcast confessions – Intimidation, Smear, Propaganda and Guilt – also supports the idea that these confessions were aimed at intimidating and destroying the reputations of people or certain groups of people (character assassinations), legitimizing a government action, or showcasing the guilt of a suspect to highlight it is combating corruption and crime. There appeared to be more functions compared with those that were expressed in the Literature Review, maybe because those scholars focused only on the political and sensitive cases. New types opened up when low political score cases were included.

If these were just normal news pieces –the suspect would be expected to give details about the crime (how they did it), explain why they did it (provide a motive), and maybe express some emotional reaction such as apologizing to victims or their family. The journalist would also be expected to interview the lawyer and their family, to offer another side to the story, but not a single one did. And while motive was not coded for (it was considered too ambiguous and therefore error-prone to code in a second language), only one confession stands out as including a clear motive in response to a journalist’s question – the Christian cult killer, Zhang Lidong (張立冬):

*Journalist: On the evening of the 28 May, **why** did you beat that person in the McDonald’s?*

*Zhang Lidong: **Because... because** she was a demon, she was an evil spirit.*

While motives did not play a big part, the typology indicated the confessions were rich in other detail.

Intimidation confessions appear to be aimed at deliberately shaming the suspect. This shame or humiliation can be seen as a repressive tool to scare them and their friends and colleagues into quitting activism – such as human rights lawyering, outspoken or investigative journalism, rights activism and so on. This was a common

role ascribed to the confessions among scholars and even Chinese media has voiced the same opinion (but not in quite the same disapproving manner). For example, the nationalist Chinese-language version of the newspaper, *Global Times* (環球), said that Wang Xiaolu's (王曉璐) confession was likely broadcast to “execute one as a warning to others” (殺一儆百).⁶³ Public shaming is a powerful tool of intimidation in China, where a “culture of heroes” exists among dissidents and expressing repentance or betraying your colleagues is a way to destroy someone in their own eyes and the eyes of their friends.⁶⁴

Guilt confessions were those that scored low on all the confession categories – they were the “plainest” – the suspect merely offering details of the crime and usually not much else. It seems reasonable to assume that the function of Guilt confessions is therefore to enhance regime legitimacy by showing the public that the authorities are punishing the “bad guys” and not protecting them – essentially and ironically bypassing the illegitimacy of a televised confession to improve the public's favourable perception of China's resolve towards a good rule of law.

Smear confessions were characterized with supporting confessors informing and criticizing main confessors and/or off-screen targets and in that sense their purpose is the most transparent. They appear to be a blunt instrument aimed at destroying all support for the target; they also appear to be most often used when the target has a strong support base, whether that be Charles Xue with his 12 million Weibo followers or Ilham Tohti who is very popular among some Uighurs, the dissident community and overseas. The content of Smear confessions tends to focus on destroying the target's character – by painting them anti-China (particularly effective in this new era of resurgent nationalism), morally corrupt (improper sexual relations, financial greed, or vain), or just unprofessional. Some consider the anti-China element important and that confessing to colluding with anti-China forces is the key to winning lenient treatment, for example the cases of Zhai Yanmin and Wang Yu (王宇) (Lam, 2016).

⁶³ Shan, R. (2015, September 2). 单仁平：《财经》记者涉嫌编造信息被抓刍议. *Global Times*. Retrieved from <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/shanrenping/2015-09/7402643.html>

⁶⁴ Mooney, P. (2011, July 4). Silence of the dissidents. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/article/972521/silence-dissidents>

In contrast, Propaganda confessions were less about the suspect and more about educating or deterring the Chinese public about a new crackdown or new regulation, such as anti-drugs or anti online rumour spreading. Their confessions appeared to be “tailored” to express support for the government and its actions, with some confessors saying they should be held up as a “warning” to others not to make the same mistake, and to ask for lenient treatment because they will never commit the same crime again.

Sub-themes of Denial and Anti-China were also recorded. A portion of Denial confessions directly addressed criticisms or accusations levelled at China – for example uproar over the alleged kidnappings of the Hong Kong booksellers and the detention of a foreign national (Peter Dahlin). Clearly, the main audience is not the Chinese public for these confessions, but rather the original accusers. Thus, no Denial video was aired on Xinwenlianbo (XWLB), and several of the Denial videos (Wang Yu and Gui Minhai (桂敏海)) were broadcast on non-state media. Sometimes, these Denial videos seemed to make the situation worse for Beijing – the reaction from overseas audiences is often one of shock, disbelief and even anger.⁶⁵ Gui Minhai’s January 2016 appearance is a good example of a Denial confession:

It was my own choice to come back and surrender. It has nothing to do with anyone else. I also don't want any individual or organization and that includes Sweden to intervene or interfere in my case (Gui Minhai).

Hard and soft guilt scores were higher for some of the Intimidation and most of the Guilt confessions. This makes sense if it is assumed that the images of guilt – bars, handcuffs, and police interactions – are being used as symbols of power and punishment to shame the suspect (for the Intimidation confessions) and to strengthen the message of guilt for the Guilt confessions. It would be distracting to have high

⁶⁵ See Huang, Z. (2016, January 18). Chinese citizens don't believe Hong Kong bookseller Gui Minhai's public confession either. *Quartz*. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/596565/chinese-citizens-are-questioning-hong-kong-bookseller-gui-minhais-public-confession/> and Wukan, China: Villagers rally behind chief after 'confession' (2016, June 21), *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36583488>

guilt imagery with Smear or Propaganda confessions, because in these two the focus is on other people, outside groups or general support for the Party/government and its actions/policies and so we would expect an effort to be made not to make the suspect appear too “criminal.”

Intimidation confessions fell into two guilt types – ones with high guilt scores, and later (post-2015) broadcasts with low guilt scores. This paper calls them Jailhouse confessions and Neutral confessions. The first Neutral Intimidation confession appears in the summer of 2015 with the Human Rights Lawyers confessions. It is possible that because of the intense international media focus on this case, it was decided to “play down” images of detention. The trend after this is to have more Neutral confessions (with the exception of journalist Jiang Yefei (蔣葉菲) and the Taiwanese telecom fraud suspects). For Jiang’s case, it is possible that this was also part of a punishment – he was a political cartoonist who mocked Xi Jinping.⁶⁶ In the case of the Taiwanese telecom fraud suspects, the decision to show images of soft guilt is likely tied up with efforts to showcase China’s strict handling of the case – televised evidence that the suspects will be properly punished because in previous cases Taiwanese suspects have been returned to Taiwan where they receive light or no sentences.⁶⁷ Such images of guilt make good propaganda material to showcase China’s determination to dictate terms to Taiwan – which of course plays well with the Chinese public and enhances CCP legitimacy.

This shift towards Neutral Intimidation confessions could be evidence that the format of the confessions is being shaped through a learning process. Testimony for the interviewees (TC01 and TC03) reveals that suspects who are normally forced to wear prison gear are asked to change into civilian clothing. For the Human Rights Lawyers case, most of the key suspects are dressed in black T-shirts. There is a delicate balance at play here – they want to reassure or justify their detention of the suspect to the outside by showing them in a “civilized” environment, while using their confession and the news script to ensure the Chinese public see them as criminals.

⁶⁶ Dissident cartoonist Jiang Yefei repatriated to China (n.d.), *Cartoonists Rights Network International*. Retrieved from <https://cartoonistsrights.org/dissident-cartoonist-jiang-yefei-repatriated-to-china/>

⁶⁷ Blanchard, B. (2016, April 18). China steps up war of words with Taiwan over fraud suspects. *Reuters*. Retrieved from www.reuters.com/article/us-china-taiwan-idUSKCN0XF07D

Latest developments

Following four years of these high-profile televised confessions, several changes are emerging. First, unless the suspect is a foreigner or the case is very high profile, the broadcast of suspects' confessions has become almost normalized – it does not appear to attract the same amount of international media attention. Have they lost their power to shock? That might not actually be such a bad outcome. If they lose their power to shock, they will lose their power to both intimidate and to spread Party propaganda. One thing that humans are very good at doing is adapting to new situations.

Take the case of detained rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang (王全璋) who was disappeared in the 709 Crackdown. He has not been seen since July 2015. Some fear he is already dead. His friend, Ge Wenxiu (葛文秀), posted a video message on Twitter in May 2017. “Lawyer Quanzhang are you still alive? We don’t mind if you make a damn confession on Chinese TV and come home. Come home.”⁶⁸ This response indicates that in the interests of survival, activists are beginning to simply view these confessions as another hoop to jump through in the cycle of repression. When the odds are so high – a person’s health, and life even – the humiliation and the betrayal can be overlooked.

A second change is that some activists are trying to protect themselves against the likelihood of being forced to make a televised confession by making their own video in advance. In March 2017, lawyer Chen Jiangang (陳建剛) made a recorded statement to be released in the event of his detention in which he said:

*“Any written, oral, or video confession, self-degradation, or accusation against other people will only have been made under the circumstances that I have been deprived of liberty, am under duress, or am being tortured and threatened. Those are the only circumstances under which I could be forced to say such things, and none of them will be true.”*⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Sudworth, J. (2017, May 22). Wang Quanzhang: The lawyer who simply vanished. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-39974953>

⁶⁹ Lawyer Chen Jiangang, With Family and Two Friends, Seized by Armed Police in Yunnan (2017, May 3), *ChinaChange*. Retrieved from <https://chinachange.org/2017/05/03/breaking-lawyer-chen-jiangang-with-family-and-two-friends-seized-by-armed-police-in-yunnan/>

A third development was that the authorities also appear to be using the televised confession as a threat to silence the relatives of detainees. In April 2017, a go-between for the wife of Lee Ming-cheh (李明哲), a Taiwanese NGO worker who was detained on the mainland a month earlier, told her that she should stop talking to the press about her husband's case or his confession would be broadcast on a Guangdong TV station.⁷⁰ Since then, Lee has been arrested on charges of state subversion, but no confession has yet been broadcast. Of course, that threat, if real, also exposes these confessions as mere “show” confessions.



⁷⁰ Horton, C. (2017, April 10). Wife of Detained Activist From Taiwan Is Barred From China. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/10/world/asia/china-taiwan-activist-lee-ming-cheh.html>

Chapter 6: Conclusions

While this study is designed to answer questions about *how* China is making these televised confessions, understanding *how* provides information on *why* China is broadcasting them. This thesis argues that China's new televised confessions are acts of forced theatre aimed at strengthening the Party's right to rule China, that is enhancing CCP legitimacy. This thesis defines legitimacy as a dynamic process of legitimation not the state of being legitimate (Bourricaud, 1987); it is concerned with intentions and actions, not the outcome. As a process its aim is to create, foster and maintain the support of society for its continued rule, and that includes both attempts to legitimize itself and to delegitimize others that it deems infringes on its own right to rule. This divorces legitimacy from the end result – it does not matter whether the CCP is successful or not at bolstering legitimacy with these confessions – what concerns this study is that the confessions can be understood to be an attempt to do so.

The interviews in this thesis provide strong evidence that most if not all of these televised confessions are “show” confessions where suspects are asked to memorise “lines,” get dressed up, and “play” the role of a “confessor” in front of the camera. Because these include cases from across the country and are broadcast on national television it can be deduced that such manipulation in terms of their “production” is evidence that the state is using them for a specific purpose.

The analysis of the broadcast data showed there were four main types of confession – Intimidation, Smear, Propaganda and Guilt – which are all compatible with furthering Party legitimacy and the repression of enemies. Intimidation confessions appear to be aimed at deliberately shaming the suspect (repression); Guilt confessions appear to be aimed at convincing the public that the authorities are punishing the “bad guys” and not protecting them (legitimation); Smear confessions appear to be a blunt instrument aimed at destroying the support of wider society for the target (delegitimation); and Propaganda confessions are aimed at promoting support for the state and its actions, such as a crackdown or a new regulation (legitimation). A sub-type, the Denial confession, which made up almost one quarter of all confessions, directly addressed criticisms or accusations levelled at China – for example the uproar over the alleged kidnappings of the Hong Kong booksellers and these can be read as an attempt to legitimize its rule to overseas observers through a

show of power. In particular, the Smear confessions align with Pil's (2016) and Lu's (2016) view that these televised confessions are part of a wider strategy by the CCP to politicize and openly criminalize rights activism. The act of politicization and criminalizing rights activism is an effort to delegitimize the movement, and thus legitimize its own rule.

The CCP is not afraid of a few hundred human rights lawyers—by themselves they are merely troublesome – however, what does concern the top leadership is the possibility of a unified and wider call by Chinese society for the values activists and lawyers espouse (that is human rights, free speech, civil society, democracy, universal values, etc). So while a subset of these confessions are clearly aimed at repressing these groups of people (the Intimidation confessions in particular), repression alone cannot explain all of the broadcasts because not everyone who confessed on air was involved in activism; for example, there were also businessmen, celebrities and murderers. These televised confessions have a bigger role to play *precisely* because they are televised; that is they are made public. The detention, harassment, arrest and imprisonment of activists has mostly been kept out of the public eye in post-reform China (it is generally only reported in overseas media and talked about in activist circles inside China); the decision to broadcast their confessions is clearly aimed at a *wider* audience and therefore it must have a *wider* purpose. That *wider* purpose, this thesis argues, is legitimacy.

Further evidence flagging legitimacy can be found in how some confessions transcripts revealed deliberate efforts to associate universal values, constitutional democracy, free speech, rights defence etc,⁷¹ and those who call for, or try to practice these values in China, with being anti-China.⁷² The anti-China element common to several of these confessions chimes with Abrahamian's (1999) thesis that Iran's televised confessions were aimed at boosting legitimacy when they referred to hostile overseas forces.

⁷¹ These are the ideological crimes laid out in Document No. 9. Please see Chapter 3.

⁷² Much has been written about the CCP's use of media to enhance regime legitimacy. Xi, Stockman and Gallagher (2011) found that even commercial media play a part – they use their more sophisticated and entertaining (thus more convincing) style to influence opinion and promote regime legitimacy. Using World Value Surveys on trust levels for the government and media and his own local interviews, Kennedy (2009) explains the CCP's consistently high levels of public support by arguing its control over the education system and media have had a significant influence on improving regime support in rural regions.

Limitations

There was no way to confirm all televised confessions were recorded in this study, as some may occur on regional TV stations and search terms, however vigorous, are not infallible. This means that the data is incomplete.

As this was a grounded theory study, guided by the existing views on televised confessions, the choice of variables to code was influenced by those views. For example, could the confessions be aimed simply at improving viewer ratings or just having more police reporting? This was not investigated because of limitations imposed by research design and time constraints. It was also a factor of language ability. For example, it could be assumed that a straightforward confession would have included a motive by the confessor – or a least the journalist asking “why did you do it?” – but motive was not coded for in this study because it was considered too difficult to code (danger of mistranslation) in a second language. A native or near native Chinese speaker could repeat this study with more codes and look for incidences of motive and other categories. This study also did not test whether the confession transcripts bore similarity with official language – we might expect them to do so if the police wrote the scripts. However, these were observed on an ad hoc basis – Peter Dahlin saying he was sorry that he hurt the feelings of the Chinese people, and Wang Yu’s rejection of her human rights prize in language similar to the Chinese government’s rejection of the Court of Arbitration on the South China Sea territorial spat.⁷³ A statistical analysis of this might yield some very interesting results.

This study met with some serious restrictions as regards the choice of people to interview. It proved extremely difficult and dangerous to contact former confessors still living on the mainland. The anti-foreigner atmosphere in China has grown noticeably more hostile in the past three or four years⁷⁴ and it is increasingly dangerous for activists to have contact with anyone overseas especially on a sensitive topic such as these televised confessions. It also meant

⁷³ Wen, P. (2016, August 2). A Confession few believe: Chinese rights lawyer Wang Yu is ‘freed.’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.smh.com.au/world/a-confession-few-believe-chinese-rights-lawyer-wang-yu-is-freed-20160801-gqipos.html>

⁷⁴ Chen, T-P. (2015, January 30). Chinese Education Minister Warns Against ‘Infiltration’ of Western Ideas. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2015/01/30/education-minister-warns-against-infiltration-of-western-ideas/>

that it was very difficult to contact scholars on the mainland. Efforts were made to contact scholars and media workers but emails remained unanswered. A very interesting direction of study would be to talk to legal and media professionals on the mainland to survey their response to the TV confessions and – even more insightful – to talk to CCTV media workers who had taken part in making confessions.

Interview sessions with people who were detained on the mainland and had given confessions were upsetting. At least in one case, the interviewee is still suffering from the effects of his ordeal. This emotional impact has the unavoidable effect of adding bias to this research. The author has tried to be as objective as possible but is open to criticism on this account.

Suggestions for further study

This study threw up a wealth of new areas of research. Both the confessions of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials and the televised trial confessions are worthy of analysis and comparison to reveal how much they borrow from each other and their relative roles. A comparison with the public self-criticism sessions of the 1960s era would also be interesting. What are the commonalities? What are the differences? Another question asked but not answered in this study was to what extent do the Chinese public believe these confessions? This would be difficult to research but could be achieved through anonymous surveys and analysis of comments online. Surveying the community of political activists about their response to these confessions and how they view those in their in-group who make confessions on air could also produce information that could help the community cope with this new phenomenon.

Parting words

During the final stages of writing this thesis, news emerged that jailed Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波) had end-stage liver cancer more than seven years into his 11-year sentence for state subversion. For many Chinese activists, Liu Xiaobo is a true hero because he sacrificed his freedom for truth, refusing to trade it in for early release.⁷⁵ In a distressing, clumsy and repugnant effort, a video – purportedly from the

⁷⁵ There were reports in 2010, one year into Liu Xiaobo's detention, that he rejected an offer of freedom and exile overseas if he confessed. Please see Branigan, T. (2010, November 22). Liu Xiaobo will only accept unconditional

Chinese authorities – began circulating online showing Liu receiving “good” medical treatment in prison.⁷⁶ It was not a confession, but it was the same heavily edited, alternate reality and insulting effort to control the truth. The German doctor who was invited to observe Liu had the integrity to speak out when a video was released of him at Liu’s hospital bedside without his permission – in fact against his wishes and in violation of patient-doctor confidentiality.⁷⁷

And this is what is key – and what, hopefully, this thesis can contribute to highlighting – China’s televised confessions and staged videos are dishonest, manipulative, and an insult to human dignity. It is important the international community are always made aware of this behaviour, that it should uphold the integrity of the human spirit, and call China out on it every time.



release, says lawyer. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/22/liu-xiaobo-release-offer-reports>

⁷⁶ Lau, M. (2017, June 29). Video surfaces apparently showing terminally ill Nobel Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo’s life in prison. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2100495/video-apparently-showing-chinese-activist-liu-xiaobos-prison-life>

⁷⁷ Liu Xiaobo: German anger at China over hospital videos (2017, July 11), *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-40565196>

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Appendices

Appendix I: Brief introduction to the 38 main confessors

(1) Liang Hong (梁鴻)

15-07-13-GSK-Liang Hong

He was British pharmaceutical firm GlaxoSmithKline's (GSK's) vice-president and operations manager in China. The company was accused of bribing officials and doctors to boost medicine sales in China with the money being laundered through hundreds of travel agencies. Liang, while not directly confessing to bribery in the televised confession, described how he used a Shanghai travel agency in "dealing with government departments." Weng Jianyong (翁劍雍), the head of the Shanghai travel agency, also appeared in the broadcast as a supporting confessor. Liang was sentenced the following year to a two-year jail sentence with a three-year suspension.

(2,3) Qin Huohuo (秦火火) and Lierchaisi (立二拆四)

22-08-13-Bloggers-Qin-Lier

Qin Huohuo, whose real name is Qinzhihui was a marketing associate for a Beijing marketing firm called Erma, founded by Lierchaisi (real name, Yang Xiuyu). The two were arrested for posting false rumours on Weibo including one that disparaged Communist Chinese "martyr" Lei Feng as well as fake celebrity gossip. They appeared together in a televised confession in August 2013, and were the first of a string of alleged rumour mongers to be put on TV. In 2014, Qin was handed down a three-year jail sentence, while Lierchaisi was given four years.

(4) Peter Humphrey

27-08-13-GSK-Peter Humphrey

Peter Humphrey ran a corporate investigations firm in Shanghai, ChinaWhys. A few months before he was detained, he had been investigating a case for GSK. He was accused of trading in Chinese citizen's private information and sentenced to 2.5 years, an unusually harsh sentence for this crime. He was released a few months

before his sentence ended on medical grounds. He claims that his case was linked to the GSK bribery case and he was “collateral damage.”⁷⁸

(5) Charles Xue (薛必群)

29-08-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue,

15-09-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue,

29-09-13-Bloggers-Dong-Xue

Charles Xue is an American-Chinese venture capitalist and popular blogger (in 2013, he had 12 million followers). His posts were sometimes critical of the government. He is unusual in this study in that he made three confessions in August and September. In the first he appears with a number of women who claim that he paid them for sex and that he also liked to have group sex. In the second two (one of them with Dong Liangjie, see below), he talks about how his vanity caused him to act irresponsibly online and forward posts without checking them. In his confession he says the new anti-rumourmongering law was necessary for social stability. He was released on bail in April 2014 on medical grounds.

(6) Dong Liangjie (董良傑)

29-09-13-Bloggers-Dong-Xue

Dong Liangjie is an environmentalist and businessman. He was accused of using popular bloggers, such as Charles Xue, to help promote his water filter company by spreading false rumours about the environment including one about China’s tap water containing high levels of contraceptives. Dong was released in June 2014 because his crimes were too insignificant.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Gracie, C. (2015, July 10). Investigator Peter Humphrey warns over GSK China ordeal. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-33490446>

⁷⁹ Environmental rumormonger released (2014, June 9), *Global Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/864540.shtml>

(7) Dong Rubin (董如彬)

17-10-13-Bloggers-Dong Rubin

Yunnan-based Dong Rubin, who had blogged about official corruption and police brutality, was arrested in 2013 for illegal business activities connected with his communications company. In his televised confession he said he had posted hyped up news for his clients. Hou Peng (侯鹏), the general manager of his company, also appeared in the televised package as a supporting confessor. Dong was sentenced to six and a half years for additional crimes, including blogging fake information for clients, in the summer of 2014.

(8) Chen Yongzhou (陳永洲)

26-10-13-Journalists-Chen Yongzhou

In the months before his arrest, Chen Yongzhou, a journalist with the Guangdong-based *New Express* newspaper, had written several articles about Zoomlion, a partially state-owned company that makes construction equipment, with allegations it had committed illegal business practices. After he was detained, his paper put out two front-page ads calling for his release, a bold and unusual move. After the televised confession was broadcast – in which he said he accepted bribes to run stories – the paper retracted its appeal. Chen was sentenced to a year and 10 months on charges of defamation and bribery.

(9) Gao Yu (高瑜)

08-05-14-Journalists-Gao Yu

Just ahead of the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, Gao Yu, a veteran journalist who was then 70 years old, was detained in April, making her television appearance a month later in May, confessing to leaking state secrets overseas (thought to be Document No. 9). A day before her trial she told her lawyer that her confession was forced because she was protecting her son – he was initially detained but then later released. In April 2015, she was sentenced to seven years, but in November 2015, this was reduced to five and she was moved to house arrest because of medical reasons. During her prison time there were reports that she was being denied medical treatment unless she agreed to do another televised confession.

(10) Xiang Nanfu (向南夫)

13-05-14-Journalists-Xiang Nanfu

Xiang Nanfu was a writer for the overseas Chinese website, Boxun. He gave his confession a little over a week after he was detained on charges of picking quarrels and provoking trouble and publishing fake stories about China on the Boxun site, including on organ harvesting and police brutality. In his televised confession he said he exaggerated and made up stories and also had sex with petitioners. He was released in August because he was remorseful and had admitted his guilt. His detention and confession also took place in the run up to the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

(11) Zhang Lidong (張立冬)

31-05-14-Church of the Almighty God-Zhang Lidong

Just three days after a woman was beaten and stamped to death in a McDonald's, one of the attackers, Zhang Lidong appeared on TV, with his head shaved, confessing to killing her because she was an "evil spirit". Zhang said he belonged to a banned Christian cult called Church of the Almighty God. He was executed in February 2015. Please see Appendix II for Zhang's confession script.

(12) Mirzat

25-06-14-Uighur terror-Mirzat

Mirzat confessed to attacking people in a mahjong parlour in Hotan, a city in Xinjiang, with two other men. Mirzat was the only Uighur suspect in this study that did not have his head shaved. In the video his head was bandaged and he talks as if he is drugged. The journalist specifically asks him questions about his knowledge of Islam, to which he answers "I don't know" each time. It is not known what happened to Mirzat.

(13) Ning Caishen (寧財神)

26-06-14-Drugs-Ning Caishen

TV screenplay writer Ning Caishen (real name, Chen Wanning) confessed to taking meth on television with his face blurred, apologizing and saying that he knew drugs were bad for your health. His detention was part of a spate of celebrity arrests in

conjunction with “one of the country's biggest crackdowns on drugs in recent memory.”⁸⁰ He was released less than two weeks later following the end of his administrative detention.

(14) Zhang Yuan (張元)

29-06-14-Drugs-Zhang Yuan

Independent film director Zhang Yuan was detained after police tried to test him at a Beijing train station during a random drugs check. Various versions of his confession, with his face blurred, appeared on state television between 25 and 29 June. His CCTV13 *Morning News* confession has him describing the debilitating effects of drugs at length. Zhang Yuan was also released around two weeks afterwards following the end of his administrative detention period.

(15) Guo Meimei (郭美美)

04-08-14-Internet-Guo Meimei

Guo Meimei was detained in July in Beijing for running an illegal gambling business. A few weeks later she made her televised confession in which, unlike other celebrities, her face was not blurred. In her TV appearance she talked about her gambling business that she ran with her boyfriend in Beijing. Two men and her assistant also appeared as supporting confessors with their faces blurred. Her assistant, Ms Lv, alleged she accepted money for sexual services, while one man, Mr Zhu, said she forced him to gamble and when he lost became aggressive when demanding he pay back his debts immediately. Some media reported that her confession was aired to distract the public from other potentially destabilizing stories.⁸¹ She was sentenced to five years in jail in September 2015.

⁸⁰ Kaiman, J. (2014, August 14). Chinese celebrities caught in net of drugs crackdown. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/14/chinese-celebrities-caught-drugs-crackdown>

⁸¹ Boehler, P. Zhang, C. (2014, August 4). I like to show off”: Chinese celebrity Guo Meimei confesses to prostitution, gambling charges on state TV. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1566142/i-show-guo-meimei-confesses-all-charges-cctv-broadcast>

(16) Ko Chen-tung (柯震東)

19-08-14-Drugs-Ko-Chen-tung

Taiwanese pop star and actor, Ko Chen-tung, was detained along with Jaycee Chan, the son of kungfu superstar Jackie Chan for smoking marijuana. In his televised confession, Ko, with his face blurred, cries, and apologizes repeatedly to his fans and his family. He was released 14 days later after his administrative detention ended.

(17) Nurmemet Abidilimit

27-08-14-Uighur terror-Nurmemet Abidilimit

Nurmemet Abidilimit appeared on TV with his head shaved and locked to a table, admitting to killing Jume Tahir, the imam of Kashgar's famous Id Kah mosque the month before because his sermons "distorted" Islam. His supporting confessor, Gheni Hasan, also with his head shaved and wrists locked to a table, appeared onscreen simply to say his brother had tried to dissuade him from getting involved. The two men, both teenagers, were sentenced to death a month later.

(18) Wang Xin (王欣)

26-09-14-Internet-Wang Xin

Wang Xin, the CEO of Qvod, an online video streaming platform, was accused of allowing porn to be distributed through its services. He fled overseas and was on the run for 110 days before he was arrested in South Korea in August 2014.⁸² In his confession, a month later, in which he talks vaguely about the influence of the Internet, he appears with a shaved head and at one point in a cage facing his police interrogators. His trial was live streamed in January 2016 when he staged a lively defense, and it was widely and freely discussed in Chinese media, with many people expressing support for him. At his second hearing later that year, he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 42 months in jail.

⁸² Bischoff, P. (2014, August 15). CEO of China's most popular piracy app arrested after 110 days on the run. *Tech in Asia*. Retrieved from <https://www.techinasia.com/ceo-chinas-popular-piracy-app-arrested-110-days-run>

(19) Shen Hao (沈灝)

29-09-14-Journalists-Shen Hao

21-11-14-Journalists-Shen Hao

Shen Hao, the co-founder of *21st Century Business Herald* was detained on 25 September accused of news extortion. He appeared four days later in his first confession and again in November in a second confession. Shen was widely admired for being a pioneer in Chinese investigative reporting. In his TV appearances, in which at one point he breaks down, he confessed to accepting payments from companies to spike negative stories. This practice is widespread in Chinese media (something which Shen also points out in his November confession) and many at the time queried why Shen had been singled out.⁸³ Other colleagues appear in both confessions as supporting confessors. In December 2015 he was sentenced to four years in jail.

(20) Zhai Yanmin (翟岩民)

22-06-15-HR Lawyers-Zhai-Liu

12-07-15-HR Lawyers-3 lawyers

19-07-15-HR lawyers-Zhou Shifeng

Zhai Yanmin is a rights activist who worked for Fengrui law firm. He was detained in June 2015, several weeks before the 709 Crackdown, and he appears in three confessions, one in June, and two in July, all aimed at destroying the reputation of Zhou Shifeng and his Fengrui Law Firm. In August 2016, he was convicted on charges of state subversion but given a relatively light sentence – three years jail and four years suspended – because he pleaded guilty and, some say, gave an interview to media after the trial in which he denigrated democracy and human rights movements and said his previous work was instigated by hostile forces from overseas (Lam, 2016).

⁸³ Luo, C. (2014, October 1). Media colleagues jump to senior journalist Shen Hao's defence after televised confession. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1604624/media-colleagues-jump-shen-haos-defence-after-televised-extortion>

(21) Liu Jianjun (劉建軍)

22-06-15-HR Lawyers-Zhai-Liu

19-07-15-HR lawyers-Zhou Shifeng

Rights lawyer Liu Jianjun, also detained in June with Zhai, appeared in two confessions, one in June and one in July. By his second TV appearance his head had been shaved and he looked significantly thinner and even ill. He confessed to paying petitioners to protest outside courthouses. He was eventually released on bail (interview, TC01).

(22) Zhou Shifeng (周世鋒)

19-07-15-HR lawyers-Zhou Shifeng

Zhou Shifeng, as director of Fengrui Law Firm, was the “big fish” in these confessions. His firm had been involved in several high profile cases, including that of dissident artist Ai Weiwei and a tainted baby milk scandal. His TV confession was worded cautiously; he said that his law firm had engaged in illegal acts. In that confession broadcast, eight lawyers and activists who had worked with him appeared as supporting confessors to criticize him for being unprofessional and a bad lawyer as well as two others who did not appear in the video, but were also detained – lawyer Wang Yu and activist Wu Gan. In August 2016, Zhou was sentenced to seven years for state subversion.

(23) Tursan

19-07-15-Uighur terror-Tursan

Tursan, a 23-year-old Uighur, was part of a CCTV4 documentary about jihadi migration. He was the only Uighur who was labelled a criminal suspect and had his face blurred in the program; there were also half a dozen other Uighurs, including one woman, all in prison vests, with their heads shaved (apart from the woman) and without their faces blurred. They were labelled as East Turkestan Islamic Movement members (an armed separatist group in Xinjiang) not suspects. It is possible they are already convicted and they are not coded for in this study. Tursan talked glowingly about his education in China at a school outside of Xinjiang and also how he had been tricked into going overseas in the name of jihad. At one point in the video, he talks in

English, and also cries when he mentions how much he misses his mother. It is not known what happened to Tursan.

(24) Ai Ke Abai Er

20-07-15-Uighur terror-Ai Ke Abai Er

As part of the same series on Uighurs travelling overseas allegedly to train as terrorists, a day later, CCTV4 aired this confession by a young Uighur man talking about his disillusionment with jihadi migration. He confessed to travelling to Turkey to train as a terrorist and then returning to China and plotting to bomb a shopping mall in Shijiazhuang in Hebei province. It is not known what happened to Ai Ke Abai Er. Note in early July, just a few weeks before both of these confessions aired, Thailand deported 109 Uighurs back to China.⁸⁴

(25) Wang Xiaolu (王曉璐)

31-08-15-Journalists-Wang Xiaolu

Wang Xiaolu, a journalist for the financial news magazine *Caijing*, was detained on 25 August for writing an allegedly fake story about stock market instabilities that summer. He confessed on screen to getting his information through “improper channels” and adding his own ideas to make a “sensational” story. Wang was one of around 200 people arrested connected with the stock market crashes that summer; there is some agreement that Wang was simply used as a scapegoat – the stock market crisis was a very sensitive topic at the time for the Chinese leadership. He was released sometime in early 2016 without charge.

(26) Wang Yu (王宇)

17-10-15-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu

01-08-16-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu

Human rights lawyer Wang Yu made two appearances that are both unconventional in terms of this study. The first in October 2015 occurred when she

⁸⁴ Uighurs sent back from Thailand were on way to join jihad, says China (2015, July 12), *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/12/uighurs-sent-back-from-thailand-were-on-way-to-join-jihad-says-china>

was detained under residential surveillance. She made her confession after activists were caught trying to help her teenaged son escape across the border into Myanmar. The news made international headlines. In this first confession Wang Yu is filmed almost fainting when she is told about her son's situation. She condemned the attempted escape bid saying her son was just a child. Her husband Bao Longjun also appeared, his face contorted in distress. The second confession in August 2016, is supposedly after she has been released on bail. She is no longer a suspect and is filmed in a garden talking to Hong Kong media. In this confession video she vilified Zhou Shifeng, human rights organizations, and a US human rights award she had been given weeks earlier, linking them to hostile overseas forces wanting to hurt China. She was accused of state subversion and attacked in the summer 2015 Human Rights Lawyers confessions by other activists and lawyer suspects on camera.

(27) Jiang Yefei (蔣葉菲)

26-11-15-Journalists-Jiang Yefei

Jiang Yefei, a political cartoonist and activist, fled China in 2008 and had been living in Thailand. He appeared with fellow Chinese refugee Dong Guangping as a supporting confessor, talking about how he helped people escape China and make their way to Thailand. Thai authorities handed both men over to China even though they had United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees status. They were flown back to Beijing on 15 November, along with Gui Minhai (please see next entry). Some reports allege that in his confession Jiang has a swollen face so he may have been beaten.⁸⁵ He is awaiting trial for inciting subversion of state power and people smuggling.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Mcauliffe, A. (2015, December 6). UN refugees returned to China 'confess' to charges. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/refugees-returned-china-confess-charges-151206084753618.html>

⁸⁶ Jiang Yefei: a refugee in a Chinese jail (2017, June 19), *The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders*. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@FrontLineDefenders/jiang-yefei-a-refugee-in-a-chinese-jail-742e5d16ed58>

(28) Gui Minhai (桂敏海)

17-01-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai

28-02-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai

Gui Minhai is the Swedish-Chinese owner of Mighty Current, a publisher of racy books about China and its leaders. Gui was allegedly abducted by Chinese security agents from his Thai home in 2015 and flown back to China with Jiang Yefei and Dong Guangping in November. He was one of four other booksellers from Hong Kong who disappeared around the same time. In his first confession, several months after he went missing, a teary Gui confesses to fleeing China while serving a suspended sentence for a 2003 fatal hit and run. A month later he appears in a second confession, this time with three of the other disappeared Hong Kong booksellers on *Phoenix TV* admitting to smuggling banned books into the mainland. The other booksellers act as supporting confessors, all accusing Gui. To date there is no news of Gui Minhai. His daughter continues to campaign on his behalf.

(29) Peter Dahlin

19-01-16-HR Lawyers-Peter Dahlin

Peter Dahlin is a Swedish NGO legal aid worker who was based in Beijing when he was detained in January 2016. A few weeks after he went missing, and amid international press interest in his disappearance, Dahlin appeared on state TV confessing to “hurting the feelings of the Chinese people” and engaging in criminal activities without specifying what they were. Two of his colleagues, with their faces blurred, also appeared on screen to denounce Dahlin, accusing him of anti-China crimes. Dahlin was released later in January and now lives in Thailand where he continues to work on human rights issues.

(30) Ding Ning (丁寧)

01-02-16-Ponzi scheme-Ding Ning

Ding Ning, the owner of Ezubao, an online financing platform, was arrested for running his company as a giant Ponzi scheme. The case was extremely sensitive because Ezubao was once the darling of the country – it sponsored the online broadcasts of the National People’s Congress and its logo was in the Great Hall of the People. It was also sensitive because many of its investors had protested when they

lost their money.⁸⁷ Ding, with his head shaved, appeared with several of his staff explaining how the scheme worked. The trial began in May 2017.

(31) Zhang Kai (張凱)

25-02-16-HR Lawyers-Zhang Kai

Christian lawyer Zhang Kai was detained in August 2015, but he did not appear on television until February 2016, confessing to taking on cases concerning the removal of crosses on churches in Wenzhou because he wanted the money and the fame. He appeared on regional TV station *Wenzhou Television* with his assistant Liu Peng (劉鵬) as supporting confessor. Liu Peng accused Zhang of colluding with overseas forces to hype up his cases. Zhang was released shortly afterwards in March, and appeared in another interview after the trial of Zhou Shifeng in August that year to support the court's decision as fair and correct. He later retracted that interview, saying he was coerced.

(32) (33) (34) (35) Mr Jian, Mr Xu, Mr Lin, Mr Xu

15-04-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Jian-Xu

02-05-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Lin-Xu

These four men (possibly three, Mr Xu may be the same person) appeared in orange prison vests with their faces blurred in two confessions describing how the telecom fraud worked. They were said to be part of a group of 45 Taiwanese deported from Kenya to China in April, which caused a diplomatic spat with Taipei because they were not sent back to Taiwan. The suspects also talk about how they would prefer to go back to Taiwan because they would receive much lighter sentences. With no identities, the fate of these men is not known.

⁸⁷ Quinn, J. (2016, February 3). It's a Chinese Ponzi Scheme that should really scare us. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/china-business/12138931/Its-a-Chinese-Ponzi-scheme-that-should-really-scare-us.html>

(36) Xu Qin (徐勤)

15-05-16-Ponzi scheme-Xu Qin

Businessman Xu Qin, and owner of Zhongjin Capital Management, was detained in April 2016 on his way to get married at the Vatican. He confessed on TV in a blue prison vest and behind bars to operating his company as a Ponzi scheme. The trial started in June 2017.

(37) Lin Zuluán (林祖鑾)

21-06-16-Wukan village chief-Lin Zuluán

Lin Zuluán was the elected leader of Wukan Village in Guangdong province. Wukan hit global headlines in 2011 when villagers staged huge protests against local corruption and land grabs. After Lin was detained in June 2016, the villagers again staged angry protests. His confession was aired on state TV as part of a televised press conference – Lin was seen in on camera talking stiffly and apparently reading from a statement, in which he confessed to taking bribes. The confession also sparked more villager protests who said it was staged. In September 2016 he was given a 37-month sentence, but in the following month at his appeal – which he lost – he withdrew his confession at trial which he said was false. It was reported that he had agreed to confess at his trial because he was promised a light sentence (no or little prison time).

(38) Lam Wing-kee (林榮基)

28-02-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai

06-07-16-HK Booksellers-Lam Wing-kee

Lam Wing-kee was one of the owners of Causeway Bay Books and was part of the Hong Kong bookseller disappearances of late 2015. He was detained in October 2015 in Shenzhen. He surfaced on *Phoenix TV* in February as a supporting confessor to Gui Minhai's second confession, saying Gui's books were mostly fabricated and downloaded from the Internet. He was freed on bail in 2016 but forced to work at a library in a small city in Guangdong. In June he was allowed back to Hong Kong on the condition he returned to the mainland a few days later. Instead, Lam held a press conference in which described how he was detained and forced to make the TV confession. The second confession was aired on state TV in July while

Lam was in Hong Kong and contains footage of Lam confessing to selling banned books on the mainland, listening to a policeman detail conditions of his bail, and shots of him reading a book and getting his hair cut while in detention. Lam has made detailed and publicly available testimony about his situation (Lam, 2017). He now lives in Hong Kong.



Appendix II: Framework questions for semi-structured long-form interviews

There were three different kinds of interviewees: those who had made a televised interview (TV), those who had been detained but had not made a televised interview (no TV), and scholars of Chinese law and human rights (scholar). Questions were tailored according to the specific situation of the interviewee and information that became available as the interview progressed. The table below lists the key areas that were covered with each interview type.

TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you agree to make one (threats, promises, was permission really given?) • Describe how it was made (covering confession script, clothing, delivery, who asked the questions, where, how long, retakes?) • What happened afterwards? • Why do you think they wanted you to do one? • Why do you think they are broadcasting them? • Does the public believe them? • Who is behind these confessions? • What effect are they having on the targeted community?
No TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you avoid making a confession/why do you think they didn't make you do one? • How were you treated in detention? • What do you know about those who have made them? Why did they do it? • Why do you think they are broadcasting them? • Who is behind these confessions? • Does the public believe them? • What effect are they having on the targeted community?

Scholar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you expand on the legality of these televised confessions? Are they legal or illegal? • What does their use say about China's commitment to the rule of law? • What do you know about those who have made them? Why did they do it? • Why do you think they are broadcasting them? • Who is behind these confessions? • Does the public believe them? • What effect are they having on the targeted community?
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Appendix III: The 40 Confession Events

Reference	MC	SC	OT	Denial	Juris.	XWLB
15-07-13-GSK-Liang Hong	1	1	0	no	Changsha	yes
22-08-13-Bloggers-Qin-Lier	2	0	0	no	Beijing	yes
27-08-13-GSK-Peter Humphrey	1	0	0	no	Shanghai	no
29-08-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue	1	5	0	no	Beijing	yes
15-09-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue	1	0	0	no	Beijing	no
29-09-13-Bloggers-Dong-Xue	2	0	0	no	Beijing	no
17-10-13-Bloggers-Dong Rubin	1	1	0	no	Kunming	no
26-10-13-Journalists-Chen Yongzhou	1	0	0	yes	Changsha	no
08-05-14-Journalists-Gao Yu	1	0	0	no	Beijing	no
13-05-14-Journalists-Xiang Nanfu	1	0	0	no	Beijing	yes
31-05-14-Church of the Almighty God-Zhang Lidong	1	0	0	no	Zhaoyuan, Shandong	yes
25-06-14-Uighur terror-Mirzat	1	0	0	no	Hotan, Xinjiang	yes
26-06-14-Drugs-Ning Caishen	1	0	0	no	Beijing	no
29-06-14-Drugs-Zhang Yuan	1	0	0	no	Beijing	no
04-08-14-Internet-Guo Meimei	1	3	0	no	Beijing	no
19-08-14-Drugs-Ko Chen-tung	1	0	0	no	Beijing	no
27-08-14-Uighur terror-Nurmemet Abidilimit	1	1	0	no	Kashgar	no
26-09-14-Internet-Wang Xin	1	0	0	no	Beijing	no
26-09-14-Ilham Tohti-3 students	0	3	1	yes	Urumqi	no
29-09-14-Journalists-Shen Hao	1	2	0	no	Shanghai	no
21-11-14-Journalists-Shen Hao	1	3	0	no	Shanghai	no
22-06-15-HR Lawyers-Zhai-Liu	2	2	1	no	Weifang, Shandong	yes
12-07-15-HR Lawyers-3 lawyers	0	3	1	no	Beijing	yes
19-07-15-HR lawyers-Zhou Shifeng	1	8	1	no	Beijing	yes
19-07-15-Uighur terror-Tursan	1	0	1	no	Urumqi?	no
20-07-15-Uighur terror-Ai Ke Abai Er	1	0	1	no	Urumqi?	no

31-08-15-Journalists-Wang Xiaolu	1	0	0	no	Beijing	no
17-10-15-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu	1	1	1	yes	Undisclosed	no
26-11-15-Journalists-Jiang Yefei	1	1	1	no	Beijing	no
17-01-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai	1	0	0	yes	Ningbo	no
19-01-16-HR Lawyers-Peter Dahlin	1	2	0	yes	Beijing	no
01-02-16-Ponzi scheme-Ding Ning	1	4	0	no	Beijing	yes
25-02-16-HR Lawyers-Zhang Kai	1	1	0	no	Wenzhou	no
28-02-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai	1	3	0	yes	Ningbo	no
15-04-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Jian-Xu	2	0	0	no	Beijing	yes
02-05-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Lin-Xu	2	0	0	no	Beijing	no
15-05-16-Ponzi scheme-Xu Qin	1	0	0	no	Shanghai	no
21-06-16-Wukan village chief-Lin Zuluang	1	0	0	yes	Lufeng, Guangdong	no
06-07-16-HK Booksellers-Lam Wing-kee	1	0	0	yes	Ningbo	no
01-08-16-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu	1	0	1	yes	Tianjin	no

Key: MC=number of main confessors, SC = number of supporting confessor, OT = off-screen targets, Juris. = Jurisdiction, XWLB = Xinwenlianbo



Appendix IV: The 38 main confessors by confession event

Name	Name in Chinese	Nat.	m/f	Crime in confession	Result	Date	Retracted
Liang Hong	梁鴻	CH	m	Bribery	SS	Sep-14	no
Qin Huohuo	秦火火	CH	m	Spreading rumours online	PS	Apr-14	no
Lierchaisi	立二拆四	CH	m	Spreading rumours online	PS	Nov-14	no
Peter Humphrey	—	FO	m	Selling personal information	PS	Aug-14	yes
Charles Xue	薛必群	OC	m	Soliciting prostitutes, group sex	RE		
Charles Xue	薛必群	OC	m	Spreading rumours online	RE		
Dong Liangjie	董良傑	CH	m	Spreading rumours online	RE	Jun-14	no
Charles Xue	薛必群	OC	m	Spreading rumours online	RE	Apr-14	no
Dong Rubin	董如彬	CH	m	Falsely reporting registered capital	PS	Jul-14	no
Chen Yongzhou	陳永洲	CH	m	Defamation	PS	Oct-14	no
Gao Yu	高瑜	CH	f	Leaking state secrets abroad	PS	Apr-15	yes
Xiang Nanfu	向南夫	CH	m	Selling fake news	RE	Aug-14	no
Zhang Lidong	張立冬	CH	m	Murder	EX	Oct-14	no
Mirzat	—	UI	m	Axe attack	NK		no
Ning Caishen	寧財神	CH	m	Taking meth	AD	Jul-14	no
Zhang Yuan	張元	CH	m	Taking drugs	AD	Jul-14	no

Guo Meimei	郭美美	CH	f	Lying, illegal gambling, prostitution	PS	Sep-15	no
Ko-Chen-tung	柯震東	TW	m	Smoking marijuana	AD	Aug-14	no
Nurmemet Abidilimit	-	UI	m	Murder	EX	Sep-14	no
Wang Xin	王欣	CH	m	Disseminating porn	PS	Sep-16	no
Shen Hao	沈灝	CH	m	News extortion	PS		no
Shen Hao	沈灝	CH	m	News extortion	PS	Dec-15	no
Zhai Yanmin	翟岩民	CH	m	Public order crimes	SS	Aug-16	no
Liu Jianjun	劉建軍	CH	m	Public order crimes	RE		no
Zhou Shifeng	周世鋒	CH	m	Running a crime syndicate	PS	Aug-16	no
Tursan	-	UI	m	Terrorism	NK		no
Ai Ke Abai Er	-	UI	m	Terrorism	NK		no
Wang Xiaolu	王曉璐	CH	m	Spreading fake information	RE	Feb-16	no
Wang Yu	王宇	CH	m	Subversion of state power	RE	Aug-16	no
Jiang Yefei	蔣葉菲	CH	m	People smuggling	NK		no
Gui Minhai	桂敏海	OC	m	Fleeing after fatal hit and run	NK		no
Peter Dahlin	-	FO	m	Endangering state security	RE	Jan-16	yes
Ding Ning	丁寧	CH	m	Ponzi scheme	NK		no
Zhang Kai	張凱	CH	m	Endangering national security	RE	Mar-16	yes
Gui Minhai	桂敏海	OC	m	Selling banned books	NK		no
Mr Jian	-	TW	m	Fraud	NK		no
Mr Xu	-	TW	m	Fraud	NK		no
Mr Lin	-	TW	m	Fraud	NK		no
Mr. Xu	-	TW	m	Fraud	NK		no

Xu Qin	徐勤	CH	m	Ponzi scheme	NK		no
Lin Zuluán	林祖鑾	CH	m	Accepting bribes	PS	Sep-16	yes
Lam Wing-kee	林榮基	HK	m	Distributing banned books	RE	Jun-16	yes
Wang Yu	丁寧	CH	f	Subversion of state power	RE	Aug-16	no

Key: CH=Chinese, FO=foreigner (ex-Taiwanese), OC = Overseas Chinese, UI= Uighur, HK = Hong Kong, TW = Taiwan, SS = suspended sentence, PS = prison sentence, RE = released or escaped, EX= executed, NK = not known (could be awaiting trial, or still disappeared), AD = administrative detention (usually <=14 days), m = male f = female



Appendix V: Visual data by confession event (CCTV13 or equivalent)

Reference	LT	BB	SH	HG	PC	HC	PI	PW	SC	SG	FB
15-07-13-GSK-Liang Hong	no	no	no	0	no	no	yes	no	no	1	no
22-08-13-Bloggers-Qin-Lier	no	yes	no	1	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	4	no
27-08-13-GSK-Peter Humphrey	no	no	no	0	yes	yes	no	yes	no	3	yes
29-08-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue	no	no	no	0	yes	no	no	yes	no	2	no
15-09-13-Bloggers-Charles Xue	no	yes	no	1	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	4	no
29-09-13-Bloggers-Dong-Xue	no	yes	no	1	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	4	no
17-10-13-Bloggers-Dong Rubin	no	yes	yes	2	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	5	no
26-10-13-Journalists-Chen Yongzhou	no	no	yes	1	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	5	no
08-05-14-Journalists-Gao Yu	no	no	no	0	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	4	yes
13-05-14-Journalists-Xiang Nanfu	no	no	no	0	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	4	no
31-05-14-Church of the Almighty God-Zhang Lidong	no	yes	yes	2	yes	yes	yes	no	no	3	no
25-06-14-Uighur terror-Mirzat	no	no	no	0	yes	yes	no	yes	no	3	no
26-06-14-Drugs-Ning Caishen	no	no	no	0	no	no	yes	no	no	1	no
29-06-14-Drugs-Zhang Yuan	no	no	no	0	yes	no	yes	yes	no	3	yes
04-08-14-Internet-Guo Meimei	no	no	no	0	yes	yes	no	yes	no	3	no
19-08-14-Drugs-Ko-Chen-tung	no	no	no	0	yes	no	yes	no	no	2	yes
27-08-14-Uighur terror-Nurmemet Abidilimit	yes	yes	yes	3	yes	no	no	no	no	1	no
26-09-14-Internet-Wang	no	yes	yes	2	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	4	no

Xin											
26-09-14-Ilham Tohti-3 students	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
29-09-14-Journalists-Shen Hao	no	no	no	0	yes	no	no	no	no	1	no
21-11-14-Journalists-Shen Hao	no	no	no	0	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	5	no
22-06-15-HR Lawyers-Zhai-Liu	no	no	no	0	no	no	yes	yes	yes	3	no
12-07-15-HR Lawyers-3 lawyers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
19-07-15-HR lawyers-Zhou Shifeng	no	no	no	0	no	no	no	no	no	0	no
19-07-15-Uighur terror-Tursan	no	no	yes	1	yes	no	no	no	no	1	yes
20-07-15-Uighur terror-Ai Ke Abai Er	no	no	yes	1	yes	yes	no	yes	no	3	no
31-08-15-Journalists-Wang Xiaolu	no	no	no	0	no	no	no	no	no	0	no
17-10-15-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu	no	no	no	0	no	no	no	no	no	0	no
26-11-15-Journalists-Jiang Yefei	no	yes	yes	2	yes	no	yes	yes	no	3	no
17-01-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai	no	no	no	0	no	no	no	no	no	0	no
19-01-16-HR Lawyers-Peter Dahlin	no	no	no	0	no	no	no	no	no	0	no
01-02-16-Ponzi scheme-Ding Ning	no	yes	yes	2	yes	yes	yes	no	no	3	no
25-02-16-HR Lawyers-Zhang Kai	no	no	no	0	no	no	yes	no	no	1	no
28-02-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai	no	no	no	0	no	no	no	no	no	0	no
15-04-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Jian-Xu	no	no	no	0	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	4	yes
02-05-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Lin-Xu	no	no	yes	1	yes	yes	yes	no	no	3	yes
15-05-16-Ponzi scheme-Xu Qin	no	yes	no	1	yes	no	yes	no	no	2	no

21-06-16-Wukan village chief-Lin Zuluán	no	no	no	0	no	no	yes	no	no	1	no
06-07-16-HK Booksellers-Lam Wing-kee	no	no	no	0	no	no	yes	no	no	1	no
01-08-16-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu	no	no	no	0	no	no	no	no	no	0	no

Note: [26-09-14-Ilham Tohti-3 students] and [12-07-15-HR Lawyers-3 lawyers] are not coded because there are no main confessors.

Key: LT=locked to table, BB=behind bars, SH=shaved head, HG=hard guilt score, PC=prison clothing, HC=handcuffs, PI=police interrogation, SC=signing confession, SG=soft guilt score, FB=face blurred.



Appendix VI: Confession data by confession event (CCTV13 or equivalent)

Reference	SC	Cr	In	Re	CCP	Me	Wa	Pr	Sex	\$	Fa	Co	AC
15-07-13-GSK-Liang Hong	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
22-08-13-Bloggers-Qin- Lier	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
27-08-13-GSK-Peter Humphrey	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
29-08-13-Bloggers- Charles Xue	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
15-09-13-Bloggers- Charles Xue	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
29-09-13-Bloggers-Dong- Xue	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
17-10-13-Bloggers-Dong Rubin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
26-10-13-Journalists- Chen Yongzhou	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
08-05-14-Journalists-Gao Yu	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
13-05-14-Journalists- Xiang Nanfu	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
31-05-14-Church of the Almighty God-Zhang Lidong	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25-06-14-Uighur terror- Mirzat	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
26-06-14-Drugs-Ning Caishen	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
29-06-14-Drugs-Zhang Yuan	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
04-08-14-Internet-Guo Meimei	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
19-08-14-Drugs-Ko- Chen-tung	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
27-08-14-Uighur terror- Nurmemet Abidilimit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
26-09-14-Internet-Wang	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0

Xin													
26-09-14-Ilham Tohti-3 students	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
29-09-14-Journalists-Shen Hao	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
21-11-14-Journalists-Shen Hao	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
22-06-15-HR Lawyers-Zhai-Liu	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
12-07-15-HR Lawyers-3 lawyers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
19-07-15-HR lawyers-Zhou Shifeng	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
19-07-15-Uighur terror-Tursan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
20-07-15-Uighur terror-Ai Ke Abai Er	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
31-08-15-Journalists-Wang Xiaolu	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
17-10-15-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
26-11-15-Journalists-Jiang Yefei	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
17-01-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
19-01-16-HR Lawyers-Peter Dahlin	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
01-02-16-Ponzi scheme-Ding Ning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
25-02-16-HR Lawyers-Zhang Kai	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
28-02-16-HK Booksellers-Gui Minhai	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
15-04-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Jian-Xu	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
02-05-16-Taiwan telecom fraud-Lin-Xu	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
15-05-16-Ponzi scheme-Xu Qin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

21-06-16-Wukan village chief-Lin Zuluán	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
06-07-16-HK Booksellers-Lam Wing-kee	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
01-08-16-HR Lawyers-Wang Yu	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

Note: Chaos and Overseas were excluded because of space.

Key: SC = self criticism, Cr = criticize, In = Inform, Re = Regret, CCP = apology to CCP (or alleged victim), Me = Mercy, Wa = Warning, Pr = Propaganda, \$ = money, Fa = Fame, Co = Confess, AC=Anti-China



Appendix VII: Sample confession script

Reference	31-05-14-Church of the Almighty God-Zhang Lidong
Date of broadcast	1 June 2014
Channel	CCTV13 Morning News
Confessors	1 main confessor
Alleged crime	Beating a woman to death
Type	Journalist
Codes: confession	Inform
Codes: visual	Prison clothes, handcuffs, behind bars, shaved head, police interrogation
URL	http://news.cntv.cn/2014/06/01/VIDE1401580722149767.shtml
Headline	山东招远警方破获“5·28”故意杀人案 本台记者采访犯罪嫌疑人张立冬 (Shandong, Zhaoyuan police crack the 5-28 murder case, CCTV journalist interviews suspect Zhang Lidong)
Notes	Journalist is shown in shot, Morning News broadcast shown one day after, murder took place just a few days before – this is sold as an “CCTV exclusive”.

Reporter: 你的老家在哪儿?	Reporter: Where are you from
Zhang Lidong: 家是河北省石家庄无极县的	Zhang Lidong: I'm from Wuji county, Shijiazhuang in Hebei province.

<p>Reporter: 来烟台招远多长时间了</p>	<p>Reporter: How long have you been in Yantai, Zhaoyuan?</p>
<p>Zhang Lidong: 7 年</p>	<p>Zhang Lidong: 7 years</p>
<p>Reporter: 你从事什么职业</p>	<p>Reporter: What's your profession?</p>
<p>Zhang Lidong: 没有职业</p>	<p>Zhang Lidong: I don't have a profession</p>
<p>Reporter: 无职业</p>	<p>Reporter: You're unemployed?</p>
<p>Zhang Lidong: 对</p>	<p>Zhang Lidong: Yes</p>
<p>Reporter: 现在无业以什么为生</p>	<p>Reporter: So if you're unemployed now how do you make a living?</p>
<p>Zhang Lidong: 以我以前做生意挣的钱为生</p>	<p>Zhang Lidong: I live off the savings I made when I did some business before.</p>
<p>Reporter: 5 月 28 号的晚上 为什么要去麦当劳餐厅殴打了他人</p>	<p>Reporter: On the evening of the 28th of May, why did you beat that person in the</p>

<p>Zhang Lidong: 因为。。。因为她是恶魔她是邪灵</p> <p>Reporter: 打人的时候你是什么打的 当时是什么养的心态</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: 我就狠狠地打 然后就用脚踏</p> <p>Reporter: 就是用脚往下踏吗</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: 对 用脚跟踏</p> <p>Reporter: 踏她什么位置</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: 踏她的头部 。。。 就是她不给（电话号码） 她说去 玩去 然后我女儿就说 一看就是不好东西 就说她是邪灵 恶魔</p>	<p>McDonald's?</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: Because... because she was a demon, she was an evil spirit.</p> <p>Reporter: How did you hit her, what was you were thinking at the time?</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: I hit her very hard And then stamped on her</p> <p>Reporter: You stamped on her with your foot?</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: Yes. I stamped on her with my heel.</p> <p>Reporter: What part of her body did you stamp on?</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: I stamped on her head. ... It's that she didn't give (us her phone number) She said: go away! Then my daughter said That you can see at a glance that she's bad, that is she is an evil spirit, a demon</p>
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Reporter: 那你们信的这个教叫什么名字	Reporter: What's the name of your religion?
Zhang Lidong: 全能神	Zhang Lidong: Church of the Almighty God
Reporter: 全能神?	Reporter: Church of the Almighty God?
Zhang Lidong: 对	Zhang Lidong: Yes.
Reporter: 你们这一行所有的人 都是信这个教吗	Reporter: All the people in your group believe in this church?
Zhang Lidong: 对	Zhang Lidong: Yes.
Reporter: 你信这个教多长时间了	Reporter: How long have you been a believer in this church?
Zhang Lidong: 7 年	Zhang Lidong: 7 years
Reporter: 7 年	Reporter: 7 years?
你在这个教里边是什么级别	What rank are you in this Church?
	Zhang Lidong:

Zhang Lidong: ... 我就是跟随着	[Long pause] I'm just a follower
Reporter: 你之前认识她吗	Reporter: Did you know her?
Zhang Lidong: 不认识	Zhang Lidong: No
Reporter: 你的女儿和儿子 包括同行的人认识她吗	Reporter: Did your daughter, your son And the others know her?
Zhang Lidong: 都不认识	Zhang Lidong: None of us knew her.
Reporter: 你们信的这个教 如果碰到了你们认为的 所谓的邪灵也好 恶魔也好 你们就要给打死吗	Reporter: In your Church If you meet someone you believe is a so-called evil spirit or a demon Do You have to beat them to death?
Zhang Lidong: 没有	Zhang Lidong: No.
Reporter: 那你为什么要把这个女的给打死 要下这么重的手 要不决心把人家打死 为什么	Reporter: So why did you have to beat this woman to death And beat her so hard Why you were so set on killing her?
	Zhang Lidong:

Zhang Lidong: 因为张某说了 她就是恶魔 就是邪灵 打死她 目的就是打死她	Because Ms Zhang [his daughter] said She's a demon An evil spirit Beat her to death Our goal was to beat her to death.
Reporter: 那你们心里不考虑法律吗	Reporter: Didn't you think about the law?
Zhang Lidong: ... 不考虑	Zhang Lidong: [Pauses} No
Reporter: 也不害怕法律吗	Reporter: And you're not afraid of the law?
Zhang Lidong: 不害怕 我们相信神	Zhang Lidong: I'm not afraid. We believe in God.
Reporter: 那您现在这个处境 你心情怎么样 你感觉怎么样	Reporter: As regards your current situation How do you feel? What's your mood?
Zhang Lidong: 感觉很好	Zhang Lidong: Pretty good.
Reporter: 感觉很好	Reporter: Pretty good?
	Zhang Lidong:

<p>Zhang Lidong: 对</p> <p>Reporter: 你记得你殴打了多长时间以后才停了手 当时停手是什么情况下停的手</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: ...</p> <p>殴打了大约三分分钟左右 我记得</p> <p>Reporter: 三分分钟左右 是主动停的手吗</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: 不是 我听的有一个工作人员过来说 你们不要打了 然后我女儿就过来跟他说 你知道我们是什么人吗 你不要管</p> <p>Reporter: 你在殴打那个女的的同时 你嘴里一直在说着一些什么</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Reporter: Do you remember how long you were beating her until you stopped? And what made you stop at the time?</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: [Pause] I remember I beat her for around 3 minutes.</p> <p>Reporter: After 3 mins you stopped beating her on your own accord?</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: No. I heard a staff member come over and say Don't hit her. Then my daughter came over and said to him Do you know who we are? Don't bother us.</p> <p>Reporter: While you were beating that woman What did you keep saying? What did you say at that time?</p> <p>Zhang Lidong:</p>
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<p>你当时说的是什么</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: 说的就是 恶魔 邪灵</p> <p>Reporter: 恶魔 邪灵 是你在骂她 恶魔 邪灵</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: 嗯 打死你</p>	<p>I said... demon.... Evil spirit</p> <p>Reporter: Demon, evil spirit You were calling her a demon, an evil spirit?</p> <p>Zhang Lidong: Yeah. Beat her to death.</p>
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