

Net produces new generation of China activists

March 19 2010, By ANITA CHANG , Associated Press Writer



In this photo taken on Friday, March 12, 2010, people use computers at an Internet cafe in Fuyang, in central China's Anhui province. Chinese Internet users are being targeted for their budding grass-roots activism _ ordinary people spreading the word about grievances from every corner of the country with postings on Twitter, microblogs and other Web sites. (AP Photo)

(AP) -- Lin Xiuying believes her daughter bled to death after being gang-raped two years ago by a group of thugs that had ties to the police in their southern Chinese town.

For more than a year, the illiterate mother appealed to various government departments in Fujian province's Mingqin county, pleading for someone to take a closer look at the death of 25-year-old Yan Xiaoling that police blamed on an ectopic pregnancy.

Lin, 50, was sobbing outside a government office last summer when she met self-taught legal expert Fan Yanqiong. Fan took down the details of the case from Lin and then posted them online. Two others, You Jingyou and Wu Huaying, spoke to the mother and posted their video interview online.

On Friday, the three were in court awaiting a verdict on charges of making false accusations, which carries a sentence of up to three years in jail.

It is the latest example of Chinese Internet users being targeted for their budding grass-roots activism - ordinary people spreading the word about grievances from every corner of the country with postings on Twitter, microblogs and other Web sites.

"Netizens are using the Internet to talk about injustice," said Liu Xiaoyuan, You's lawyer. "But local officials just use their public power to suppress them."

Dozens of bloggers showed up outside Mawei District People's Court on Friday in Fuzhou city where the verdict was to be announced, tweeting constantly and posting photos from the scene online. They reportedly were met by more than 100 uniformed and plainclothes police. The case was indefinitely postponed.

China blocks online materials it deems to be harmful or pornographic, which frequently includes information that contradicts the views of the ruling Communist Party. Such restrictions prompted Internet giant Google to announce in January that it may close China-based [Google.cn](#) because it no longer wanted to cooperate with Beijing's [Internet censorship](#).

But there is a vibrant community of tech-savvy users who can easily hop

over the "Great Firewall" that blocks access to sites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. They are a minority of the 384 million people online in China but among the most vocal: young, educated, liberal-minded and unafraid of questioning the Communist government.

Twitter in particular has been harnessed by Chinese users who revel in having a forum where they can speak freely about politically sensitive matters - in 140 characters or less, of course.

"With the help of new technology, it's become quite common and convenient for citizens to exercise their right of supervising the government. It's always hard to publish articles in traditional media and it's much easier to do so on the Internet," said Zhou Ze, a law professor at [China](#) Youth University for Political Science who has spoken out about detentions related to online comments.

Those arrested or detained for trying to help Lin are just the latest to be punished for their activism.

Wang Shuai was detained in Shanghai after speaking out online about land confiscation in his hometown in central China's Henan province. Wu Baoquan was sentenced to 1 1/2 years in jail for criticizing - also online - a land compensation plan in his Inner Mongolian village.

But there have been a few victories, too.

Authorities dropped charges against a man in the eastern province of Shandong who was detained after accusing his local Communist Party secretary of corruption. An unpopular garbage incinerator project in the southern city of Guangzhou has been put on hold. A karaoke bar waitress went unpunished after fatally stabbing a drunk government official who cornered her and demanded sex. Each case got strong attention from Chinese citizens online as details spread through blogs

and forums.

Guo Baofeng, who works as a translator in the southern city of Xiamen, was among those taken away by police after posting a video interview of Lin on an overseas Web site. He became famous among Chinese netizens for sending Twitter updates while in police custody.

"Pls help me, I grasp the phone during police sleep," and "i have been arrested by Mawei police, SOS," he tweeted in English from his cell phone, avoiding Chinese characters that take longer to input. Guo was released from detention after about three weeks, though he is still under police monitoring.

Lin, the mother, does not have a deep understanding of the Internet or its workings, but knows that it is helping to keep her daughter's case in the public eye. Poor and uneducated, she can do little other than try to support those who helped spread the word of her plight by attending their court hearings.

"The authorities take advantage of us because I'm illiterate and have no money or family connections," she said. "Thankfully there are reporters and citizens helping me. They've helped so much and I hope they can keep helping us."

More information: Video of Lin Xiuying talking about her daughter's death (in Chinese):

<http://news.boxun.com/news/gb/china/2009/06/200906261220.shtml>

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