



Open Letter from 9 Sociologists: end the tragedy at Foxconn

re-printed by Sina Tech News

19 May 2010 ¹

Beijing University's Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, Lu Hui Lin, and 9 other sociologists from universities such as QingHua University and Peking University, issued an urgent joint open letter yesterday, calling for various social groups to, together, solve the problems facing new generation migrant workers as soon as possible to stop the Foxconn tragedy from happening again.

Lu Hui Lin told Sina Tech that after Foxconn discovered the sixth and seventh suicide, it already planned to investigate these incidents. However, employees continue to jump to their deaths. Thus, Lu realized the urgency of the situation and co-signed this open letter with other scholars.

The following is the full text of the open letter, released on 18 May 2010:

Since January of this year, there have been 9 incidents of staff jumping off buildings at Foxconn, causing 7 tragic deaths and 2 injuries. Why did these youths of only 20-some years choose to leave this world during the best times of their lives? These losses of lives broke our hearts, and led us to contemplate the problems of the "world's factory", and the future of new generation migrant workers.

For the past 30 years, China has relied on several hundred million cheap workers from rural areas to create this export-oriented "world factory", and to bring about consistent, rapid growth in China's economy. At the same time, workers' basic rights have long been neglected. We use the excuse that they are migrant workers from the countryside to pay them, on average, less than wages earned in Third World countries. This makes them unable to settle and live in the city, drifting between the city and rural villages, living a life that is rootless, helpless, and undignified, separated from their family where there is nobody to take care of their parents and where their children lack care and love. From the Foxconn tragedy, we hear screams coming from the lives of new generation migrant workers, warning the entire society to rethink this development model leveraged upon the sacrifice of people's basic dignity.

¹ Translated from Chinese. Read the original Chinese letter, released on 18 May 2010, at: <http://tech.sina.com.cn/it/2010-05-19/13214206671.shtml>

We call for the nation to immediately put an end to this development model leveraged upon the sacrifice of people's basic dignity.

As some of our country's enterprises take up an increasing percentage of market share in the lower end of the world production chain, we noticed that with the rise of GDP also exists an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, and lowering of workers' wages because of employment pressure. And we have noticed workers' right to freedom of speech is continually neglected. It may be said that it has been a strategic choice to use cheap labour to develop an export-oriented economy, given the restrictive lack of capital during the period of China's early reforms. But nowadays, various abusive practices have been exposed in this development strategy. The low status of workers has led to a long-term slump in domestic consumer demand, weakening the domestic impetus for continued economic growth in China. The Foxconn tragedy further exemplifies the fact that this development model is unsustainable when it comes to labor. For many of the new generation migrant workers, since the moment they left their home, they have never imagined returning to be farmers like their parents. In other words, they have journeyed to work in the city on a path of no return. When they cannot see any possibility of their work leading to a settled life in the city, the meaning of their work suddenly collapses, because there is no path forward, and the path of return is blocked. When these new generation migrant workers are trapped in this identity crisis, it leads to a series of psychological and emotional problems. This is the systemic and social reason underlying this "path of no return" for Foxconn workers.

We believe that development which takes advantage of low human rights standards is unsustainable. Today's China has ample capital and national prosperity, and already possesses the prerequisites and ability to change its model of development. If we rely on the nation, enterprises and workers' common efforts to practically solve the problems of new generation migrant workers, we can surely prevent tragedies like these from happening again.

We call for all enterprises to make real efforts to improve the treatment and rights of migrant workers, allowing them to really become "enterprise citizens". Since Foxconn built its factory in Shenzhen in 1988, it has quickly developed and expanded, and it now has factories all over the Pearl River Delta, Yangtze River Delta, Bohai Sea and the central and western regions, and has more than 600,000 staff. Foxconn is already the world's largest manufacturer of electronic products, and the global king of outsourced production. It is ranked 109th in the Fortune 500 companies and ranked as the top export enterprise in China for 7 years in a row. Foxconn as it is today cannot be separated from the blood, sweat and toil of the masses of migrant workers. Foxconn, as an industry leader that stresses corporate social responsibility, contribution to the community and concern for its employees, should pay workers wages that reflect dignity, allow them to live a normal and dignified lifestyle, meet their basic material needs, and allow migrant workers to become real "enterprise citizens".

We call for local governments to supply policies that guarantee migrant workers' social needs such as housing, education and medical care etc., allowing migrant workers to become real "community citizens".

The question of the treatment and dignity of migrant workers is not limited to a single enterprise, but is a pervasive problem in China. The greatest obstacles for migrant workers to settle and live in the city include housing, education for children and medical

care. We call for national and local governments to implement practical measures that allow migrant workers to integrate and establish roots in the city, so that they can become real “community citizens”, sharing the fruits of the economic development they themselves created. As an experimental region for reform, the rise of Shenzhen cannot be separated from the toil of these many migrants. By the end of 2008, the actual population of Shenzhen was more than 12 million, but only 2.28 million had local residency (*hukou*). It is the contribution of the foreign population, made up of mostly migrant workers, which created the prosperity of today’s Shenzhen. As the beneficiaries of reform, the City Government of Shenzhen should improve the living situation of migrant workers, implement specific programs that will solve migrant workers’ issues such as housing, education and medical care, and again, following the lead in economic development like they did in the 1980s, and strive to be an example of social development and social justice in the new century.

Finally, we call on the new generation migrant workers to treasure their lives and the lives of others. We urge them to use positive ways to respond to the situation facing workers today, strive for basic labor rights, and protect themselves and their families’ right to life. Migrant workers should unite and help each other like brothers and sisters, and improve their self-help, self-protection and self-management abilities. With the joint efforts of the community, they should participate in advancing social progress and building a harmonious society where each worker can live in dignity.

Signed:

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18 May 2010