

# Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVIII Number 2, February 2010

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Thursday, February 25, 7:30 PM.** Monthly Meeting. Caltech Y is located off San Pasqual between Hill and Holliston, south side. You will see two curving walls forming a gate to a path--our building is just beyond. Help us plan future actions on Sudan, the 'War on Terror', death penalty and more.

**Tuesday, March 9, 7:30 PM.** Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

**Sunday, March 21, 6:30PM.** Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "Factory Girls" by Leslie T. Chang.

February 4 marked the one-year anniversary of Gao's arrest. In Group 22's [human rights book discussion blog](#), Martha cited several articles raising concerns about Gao's status and whereabouts. The [Washington Post](#) published an article by Gao's wife, in which she wrote:

"One year ago today, China kidnapped my husband.

I don't know where he is. I don't know what is being done to him. The only thing I know is why he disappeared: My husband, Gao Zhisheng, defied Beijing by representing people the government finds threatening. As a leading human rights lawyer in China, he fought for those who had been abused by police, those who had their land stolen by the government and those who were persecuted for their religious beliefs."

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

I can't believe that it's February already! Time flies when you're having fun!

Group 22 members Laura, Lucas, and Stevi went to Flintridge Prep, a private school in La Canada, to speak to a group of high school students on human rights issues. They were invited to participate in a Global Awareness Day the students put on. Read all about it in this newsletter. Lucas and Stevi also met with All Saints Church members who are interested in forming a coalition to work against the death penalty.

Con cariño,  
Kathy

## PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

### GAO ZHISHENG

By Joyce Wolf

Group 22 is in the process of adopting Prisoner of Conscience Gao Zhisheng, a human-rights lawyer who was detained by the Chinese authorities one year ago. Suzanne from the Amnesty USA China Country Group has now finished putting together Gao's case file and it is being reviewed by the other members of the China Co-Group. Then Gao's case file will go to the AI Individuals at Risk program and it will be sent to our group after they approve it. We are eager to get started!

## RIGHTS READERS Human Rights Book Discussion Group

Keep up with Rights Readers at  
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>

Next Rights Readers meeting:

Sunday, March 21, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore

695 E. Colorado Boulevard  
In Pasadena

## "Factory Girls"

By Leslie T. Chang



## Author Biography

Leslie T. Chang lived in China for a decade as a correspondent for the Wall Street Journal, specializing in stories that explored how socioeconomic change is transforming institutions and individuals. She has also written for National Geographic. Factory Girls is her first book.



A graduate of Harvard University with a degree in American History and Literature, Chang has also worked as a journalist in the Czech Republic, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. She was raised outside New York City by immigrant parents who forced her to attend Saturday-morning Chinese school, for which she is now grateful.

She is married to Peter Hessler, who also writes about China. She lives in Colorado.

### Book Review

From the New York Times by Patrick Radden Keefe. Published: November 7, 2008

Toward the end of "Factory Girls," her engrossing account of the lives of young migrant workers in southern China, Leslie Chang describes receiving a gift. Min, a young woman who works at a handbag plant, presents Chang with an authentic Coach purse plucked fresh from the assembly line. It emerges that Min's dormitory-style bedroom is stuffed with high-end leatherwear. When the author proposes giving one of the handbags to the mother of Min's boyfriend, Min scoffs. "His mother lives on a farm," she says. "What's she going to do with a handbag?"

The emergence of China's titanic manufacturing base has been chronicled in numerous books and articles in recent years, but Chang has elected to focus not on the broader market forces at play but on the individuals, most of them women, who leave their villages and seek their fortunes on the front lines of this economy.

Since the 1970s, China has witnessed the largest migration in human history, Chang observes, "three times the number of people who emigrated to America from Europe over a century." There are 130 million migrant workers in China today. A few decades ago, a rural peasant could expect to live and die on the same plot of land his family had farmed for generations. But the country's explosive economic growth has allowed the young and adventurous to trade the stifling predictability of village life for the excitement, opportunity and risk of the factory boomtown.

A former China correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, Chang focuses on one boomtown

in particular, Dongguan, a frenetic jumble of megafactories in Guangdong Province. The city produces garments of every description and 30 percent of the world's computer disk drives. One-third of all the shoes on the planet are produced in the province, and Chang spends time in a factory that manufactures Nike, Reebok and other brands. It has 70,000 employees, most of them women, and boasts its own movie theater, hospital and fire department.

Dongguan is "a perverse expression of China at its most extreme," Chang suggests; it is polluted, chaotic and corrupt, but jostling also with a generation of -strivers who are unashamed of their ambition and astonishingly indifferent to risk. New arrivals from the countryside can double or triple their income in a couple of weeks by taking a computer class or learning a little English. Switching jobs becomes a form of self-reinvention, and starting a new business is as easy as purchasing a new business card.

To Chang, the factory girls seem to live in "a perpetual present." They have forsaken the Confucian bedrock of traditional Chinese culture for an improvised existence in which history and filial loyalty have been replaced by rapid upward mobility, dogged individualism and an obsessive pursuit of a more prosperous future. After revealing that her driver's license was purchased on the black market, one woman seems to voice the general ethos of the town when she says to Chang, of her abilities behind the wheel, "I know how to drive forward."

With new job opportunities forever appearing and huge personnel turnover in any given factory, friendships are difficult to make and to maintain, and Chang details the loneliness and isolation of the migrant workers. Dongguan's laborers assemble cellphones, but they purchase them as well, and with their speed-dial archives of acquaintances, the phones become a sort of lifeline, the only way to keep track of the breakneck comings and goings of friends. If a worker's cellphone is stolen, as they often are, friends, boyfriends and mentors may be lost to her forever. "The easiest thing in the world," Chang remarks more than once, "was to lose touch with someone."

People living their lives "on fast-forward" in this manner would seem to resist any kind of comprehensive portraiture by a reporter. But Chang perseveres, hanging around the factories, purchasing cellphones for some of the women she meets so that she can keep track of them, and eventually renting an apartment in Dongguan.

While she relates the stories of numerous different women, she becomes closest with Min, who gave her the purse, and with Chunming, who left her home in Hunan Province in 1992 and has cycled through countless careers and relationships in the years since. (It is Chunming who can only drive forward.)

Chang's extraordinary reportorial feat is the intimacy with which she presents the stories of these two women. Min and Chunming lack the reserve of some of their colleagues. They share their diary entries and their text messages, their romantic entanglements and their sometimes strained relationships with the families they left behind. The result is an exceptionally vivid and compassionate depiction of the day-to-day dramas, and the fears and aspirations, of the real people who are powering China's economic boom.

By delving so deeply into the lives of her subjects, Chang succeeds in exploring the degree to which China's factory girls are exploited — working grueling hours in sometimes poor conditions for meager wages with little job security — without allowing the book to degenerate into a diatribe. There is never any doubt that the factory owners in Hong Kong and Taiwan — and the consumers in American shopping malls — have the better end of the bargain. But for all the dislocation, isolation and vulnerability they experience, Chang makes clear that for the factory girls life in Dongguan is an adventure, and an affirmation of the sort of individualism that village life would never allow.

"If it was an ugly world," Chang concludes, "at least it was their own."

Patrick Radden Keefe is a fellow at the Century Foundation. His book "The Snakehead," about the Chinese human smuggler Sister Ping, will be published next year.

## REPORTS FROM STEVI CARROLL

### A Meeting at All Saints Church

Sunday, February 14, 2010, Lucas and I went to All Saints Episcopal Church to meet with church and community members concerned with the death penalty. We met James Clark, a former coordinator of Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty and the new professional organizer devoted solely to death penalty issues in California for the ACLU in Southern California.

James works with the Los Angeles County Coalition for Death Penalty Alternatives (LACCDPA [www.enddeathpenaltyLA.org](http://www.enddeathpenaltyLA.org)). This coalition meets the second Wednesday of each month (next meeting is March 10) from 6-8 pm at the ACLU office downtown, at 1313 W. Eighth St., Los Angeles, CA 90017.

We learned that three California counties create the bulk of the death penalty sentences and that LA County leads the pack. (FYI: according to the Amnesty International in California by having the death penalty as an option, our system costs \$137 million a year; without it, we'd part with 11.5 million of our tax dollars.) LACCDPA is collecting Resolutions to End Death Sentencing in LA County from various organizations. Members will present these to District Attorney of LA County Steve Cooley. We'll discuss the possibility of drafting a resolution at our next meeting. Additionally, LACCDPA is collecting signatures on a Petition to Stop Pursuing the Death Penalty, also to be delivered to the DA Cooley. Amnesty members are down with petitions so petitions will be available at book group, our monthly meeting and letter writing.

### A Visit to Flintridge Prep

Sarah Randolph, a senior at Flintridge Prep, organized a Global Awareness Assembly at the school on February 18, 2010. She invited AI Group 22 to present so Laura, Lucas and I pitched the virtues of Amnesty International to two classes of high school kids. After two short videos that showed the power of letter writing, Lucas gave an overview of the campaigns AI presently has. Aung San Suu Kyi's photo is shown for Prisoners of Conscience. Lucas used this opportunity to give a little background into her case. As Laura said, one of the students said he had already heard about the president of Burma being under house arrest. Hooray right there.

Sarah requested some AI involvement in South America. Lucas explained the research AI did into a case where the Peruvian authorities may have caused the deaths of those killed during violence at a road blockade led by Amazon Indigenous peoples in June, 2009. He brought a section of an AI report on the incident for the kids to see. Laura combined her recent trip to China with the case of Shi Tao to discuss internet censorship and what it has cost Shi Tao. She mentioned that most of the people she spoke with in China thought the censorship was acceptable. I talked about the death penalty, pending executions, and the recent execution and

exoneration. The kids listened attentively to our presentations and asked thoughtful questions during the Q&A.

Lucas and I were able to stay for lunch with the other presenters. Our tablemates represented a wide array of countries and causes. One man told the kids about Israel and Palestine, another about middle-class children in Chad and Morocco, and still another about Tibetan independence. The woman who had lunch with us told them about her work with refugees who have been tortured and are seeking asylum. Group 22's friend, Hector Aristizabal, works with her group. Just from our little lunch group I could tell Sarah gave her classmates a wider view of our world and its challenges with her Global Awareness Assembly.

### Some Death Penalty News

#### Execution

Martin Grossman, 45, was executed in Florida on Monday, February 16, 2010. Amnesty International along with the Vatican and Jewish groups had asked for clemency for him because of his below-average IQ, his history of epilepsy and the remorse he had shown. Martin's execution is the 68th in Florida since 1976 when the death penalty was reintroduced.

As of this writing, the next scheduled execution is Melbert Ray Ford, Jr. in Georgia on February 23, 2010. March is booked with eight executions scheduled beginning with Michael Sigala in Texas on the second and Lawrence Reynolds in Ohio on the ninth. (for list through September 15, 2010, go to <http://www.amnestyusa.org/death-penalty/pending-executions/page.do?id=1011587>)

### Exoneration

Gregory Flynt Taylor, 47, was exonerated in North Carolina Wednesday, February 17, 2010. He spent 17 years on death row and is the first convicted felon in U.S. history to be exonerated by a state-mandated innocence commission.

### Death Penalty Awareness Week

Death Penalty Awareness Week is February 26 to March 7. AI is partnered with Witness to Innocence (<http://www.witnesstoinnocence.org>), an organization that supports and provides speaking opportunities for those who have been exonerated from death row because of their innocence. At the WTI website, you can see the faces of people who are now freed from death row and can read their stories. These folks are well worth the visit.

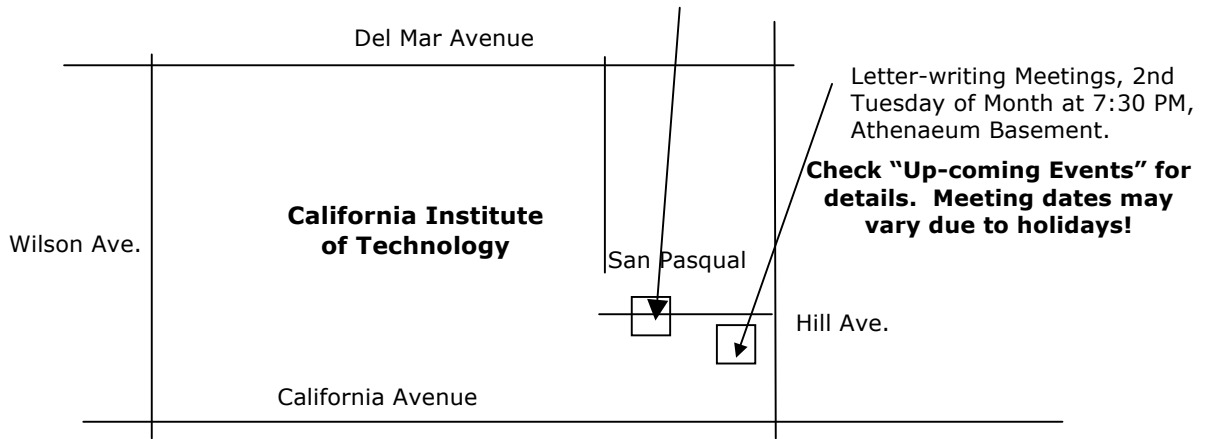
Recently as I left the office of the one doctor I don't mind seeing, she said to me, "Please keep fighting for us." So fellow activists, let's keep fighting.

### MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

Postcards to China for Shi Tao	16
Postcards for other Amnesty campaigns	4
UA's	13
Death Penalty	2
Total	35
To add your letters to the total contact <a href="mailto:lwkamp@gmail.com">lwkamp@gmail.com</a> .	

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Monthly Meetings, 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of Month, 7:30 PM,  
Caltech Y Lounge.



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar  
From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California  
Street parking is generally available.

Amnesty International Group 22  
The Caltech Y  
Mail Code 5-62  
Pasadena, CA 91125  
[www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/](http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/)  
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



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