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Changing the Practices of iSlave Producers and the Working Condition of Student- Laborers in Apple Supplier Factories in China

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The Faculty of Social Sciences

Date of Submission
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Summary of the Impact

Prof. Pun Ngai extended her longstanding action research into labour rights to the widespread but previously unresearched phenomenon of the use of **vocational school students** as a new form of labour use in Apple's supply chain in China.

This group, totalling over **20 million** since 2008, are the “**student laborers**” who fuel up China's economic growth in the post-financial crisis period.

The findings have had an accumulated impact on: influencing the agenda of **labour right investigations** and campaigns launched by local and international NGOs; **raising international media concern**; and bringing about **real changes of labour protection policy** in business CSR realm.

Outline:

2016-2019

- The CRF project of “Learning to Labor: Social Media and Migrant Labor Protection in China”

Prof. Pun Ngai

- Led the first large-scale research on the new generation of migrant workers coming from the vocational schools in China

Supported by

- Research Grants Council, University Grants Committee of Hong Kong

Research team

- The pioneer to build a digital platform ‘senseware’ to provide knowledge on labour and gender protection.

Our Research



1. In 2010 a wave of suicides occurred inside Foxconn plants. Prof Pun took the lead to form the 20-University Research Group to investigate the issue.
2. The CRF project builds on the work of the 20-University Research Group to study the student-laborers.
3. Unlike traditional rural migrant labour, this new source of labour subjects is driven from the vast amount of student interns from vocational schools under the auspice of the Chinese state and the demand of the market.

New Forms of Labor Use Identified

Expansion of Vocational Education

Vocational Schools

- To aim at training rural and urban labour force and providing millions of well-trained primary technical staff and skilled workers.
- To meet the urgent needs of manufacturing (including global electronic and apparel industries) and service sector in the post-financial period.

Children of Migrants

- They are often barred from receiving even compulsory education in public schools and taking public examination in cities.
- They have no chance to have senior secondary level of education.

The working conditions inside Apple's supplier factories revealed

Night shifts and overtime work are commonly required of student interns.

Most of the students interviewed reported that they had to work ten hours per day causing problems of physical and mental health.

This study has put the use of student laborers and their working conditions firmly on the public agenda.

media investigations and campaigns organised by local and international NGOs targeting the transnational brands especially Apple.

Key Impacts

This pioneering study provided the **first ever evidence** of the scale of students and graduates of vocational training schools being sent to industrial towns to work as **cheap unskilled labour** in manufacturing and electronic factories in China and the **working conditions** inside these factories.

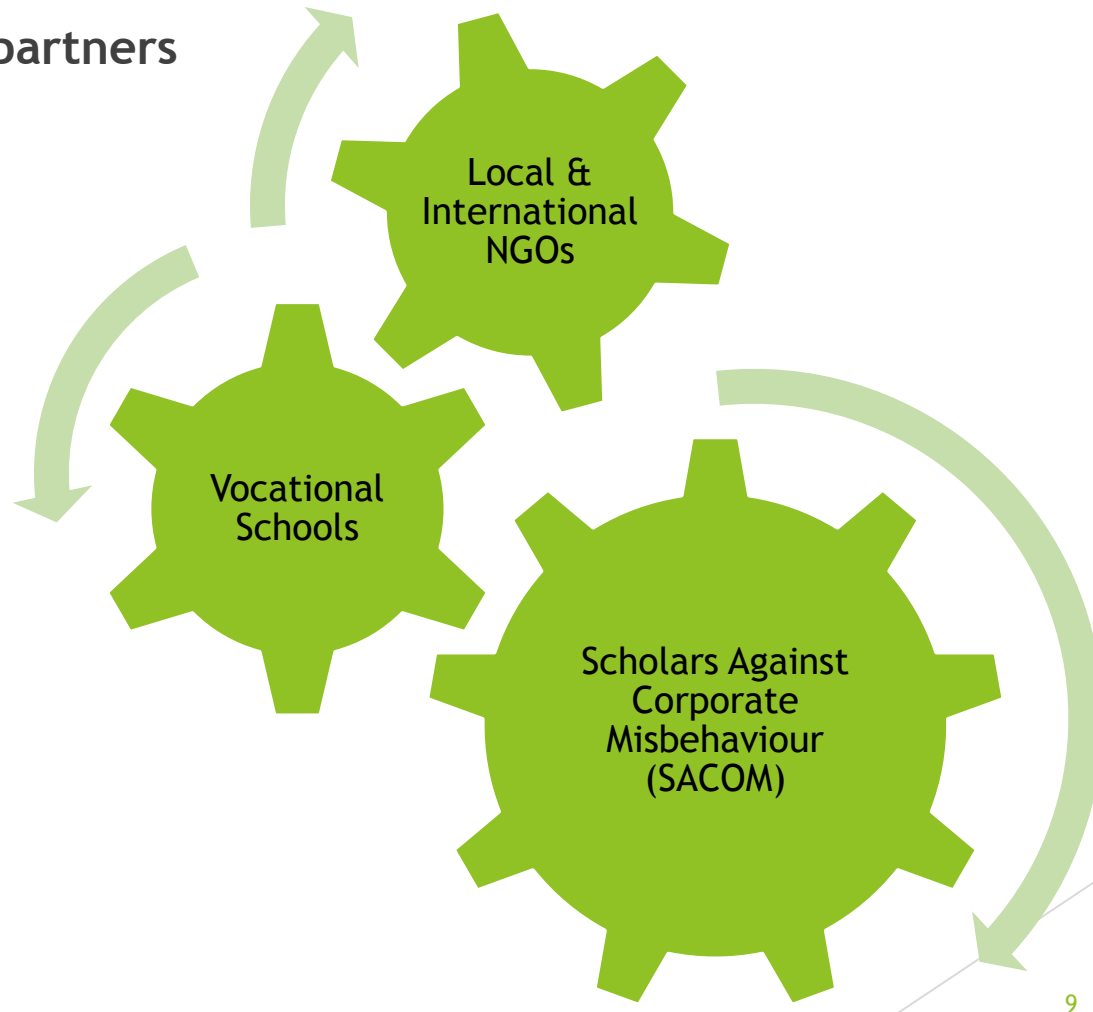
Field research in four regions of China showed that student interns from vocational training schools make up a significant part of the workforce in Foxconn factories to produce iPhones on assembly lines (from 10 % to 15%).

Engagement (Process)

- ▶ This on-going research on **vocational schools' students** started in 2010.
- ▶ The accumulated information on the misbehaviour on student labour by Apple's suppliers like Foxconn has provided resources for a large number of **local** and **international NGOs** to launch relevant **investigations** and campaigns on **labour rights**.

Engagement

External partners



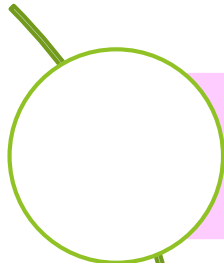
Engagement

Innovative Research Methods: Constructing “Senseware”


1. Pun’s study goes beyond pure labor studies or communication studies by moving the sphere of scrutiny into the school, workplace and social.
2. Pun’s study built a “Senseware” for migrant labor protection and to disseminate knowledge generated in this program among not only academic and **public policy circles**, but also **NGOs**, **activists**, and **student-workers** through training sessions, online engagement, and participatory action research.

Impacts Achieved


Beneficiaries



The number of student workers benefited was at least over 3,000 people in each internship period



The number of workers who benefited was over 40,000 people



A total of 50,000 workers will directly benefit from the learning curriculum as stated in the grant agreement .

Impacts Achieved

Nature and extent of the impact

1. In November 2017, four months after the launch of the **iSlave at 10 campaign**, Apple admitted in a statement that “During the course of a recent audit, we discovered instances of student interns working overtime at a supplier facility in China.
2. We’ve confirmed the students worked voluntarily, were compensated and provided benefits, but they should not have been allowed to work overtime.” .
3. Apple and Foxconn then took “immediate action to ensure that no interns are carrying out any overtime work”.

Impacts Achieved

Nature and extent of the impact

1. Another **SACOM** campaign inspired by this research has also brought direct changes to the working condition of Biel Crystal, the largest display screen manufacturer that occupies 60% of the global mobile phone glass screen market.
2. The **president of Biel Crystal** met **SACOM's** representatives after the campaign and promised to make corrective measures on a series of labour right violations within two months.

Impacts Achieved

Nature and extent of the impact

1. Two sets of learning curriculum on labour rights and gender awareness which comprised of eight units of teaching materials covering sex education, sexual division of labour, workplace sexual harassment, gender hierarchy, gender status, and gender equity issues.
2. A series of video production on labour and gender rights will also be produced (four videos of 30 minutes).

Impacts Achieved

Evidence or indicators or improvement made

1. Since 2010, SACOM has run a series of high-profile consumer campaign calling for the improvement of the working conditions in Apple's supplier factories and actively demanding Apple and Foxconn to stop its practice of forcing vocational school students to work excessively long hours in the iPhone production lines
2. In November 2017, after launched the iSlave at 10 Campaign in which Pun Ngai participated in a number of strategic meetings, to demand Apple to stop violating its own "Student Workers Protection" policy and local regulation in China

Impacts Achieved

Evidence or indicators or improvement made

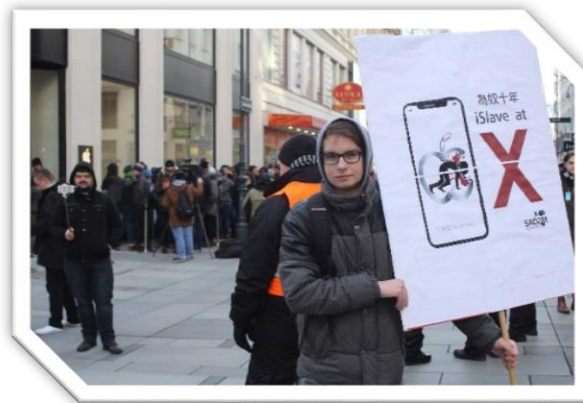
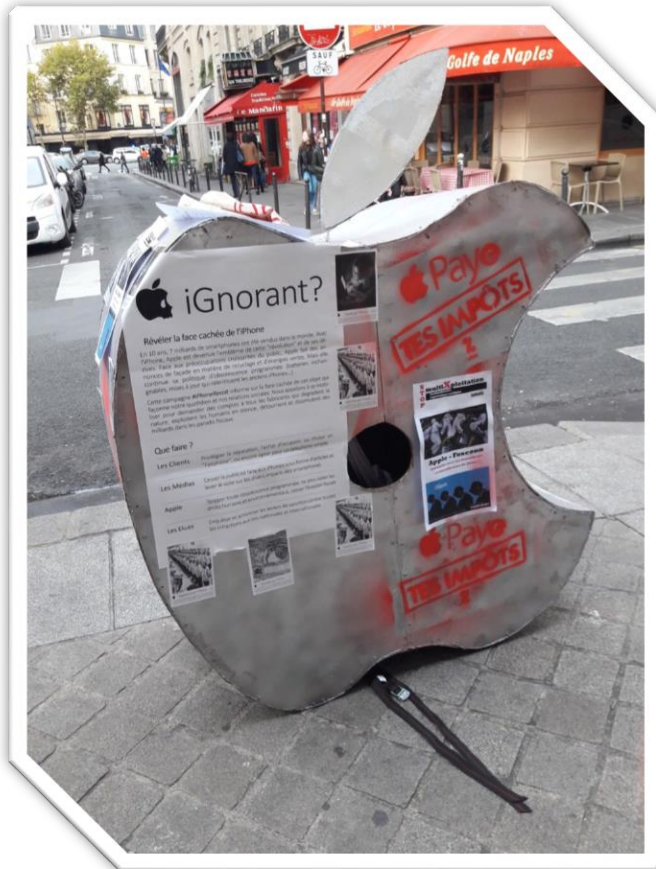
3. The International Action Week of the campaign was supported by international NGOs from more than 10 regions including Bread for All (Switzerland), Sudwind (Austria), Solidarities (France) etc.
4. Many of these NGOs explicitly acknowledged the contribution of Pun's research to their campaigns to promote awareness and sensitivity [5-3].
5. Materials were translated in Chinese, French, German, Catalan, Spanish and other languages.

2013 Protest Against Biel Crystal

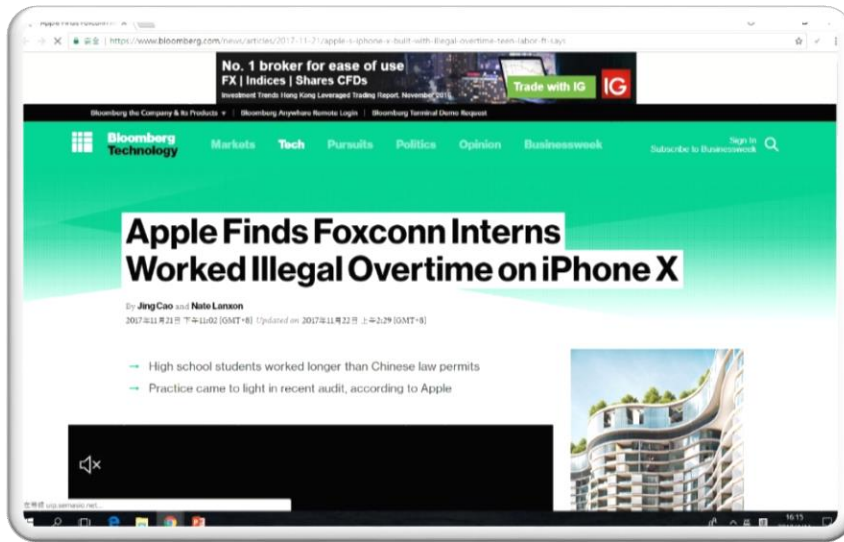


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2017 iSlave at 10 Protest in France, in Austria & in HK



2017 iSlave at 10 News on Bloomberg & Financial Times



2018 Support Letter of SACOM



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Berne, 24.04.2018

Dear Prof. Pun Ngai

We, at Bread for all (Bfa), very much appreciate your work! Your applied research is in line with our own approach. In regards to your recent research on student interns in Apple supplier factories in China, we confirm that your research and SACOM's report on it have been instrumental for our work here in Switzerland/Europe. From a lobby and campaigning perspective, the video clips that SACOM has produced based on your research results have been particularly valuable. We use them to complement our recent IT brand rating, for example, which assesses the performance of the most prominent IT brands in the Swiss market in the areas of human/workers' rights, use of conflict minerals and environmental aspects. This rating is entirely based on data from brands' sustainability and CSR reports. Therefore, the results don't necessarily reflect the reality on the ground. Apple, for instance, ranked best throughout our rating. While your research clearly shows that Apple exploit student interns in their supply chain! In our media campaign as well as in our ongoing series of lectures at Swiss universities in collaboration with an international student association we always discuss both, brands' own perspective (as shown in our IT brand rating) and SACOM's reflection of your research findings as presented in your respective reports. SACOM's and your compliance investigations of brands' performance regarding national/international laws, industry standards and brands' own codes are extremely valuable to us. Your work helps us to sensitize and influence public and private consumers and industry stakeholders alike. So as to contribute to better respect for human rights in corporates' supply chains, and in business, in general.

With many thanks and
best wishes

Karin Mader
Human rights in the Electronics industry
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