



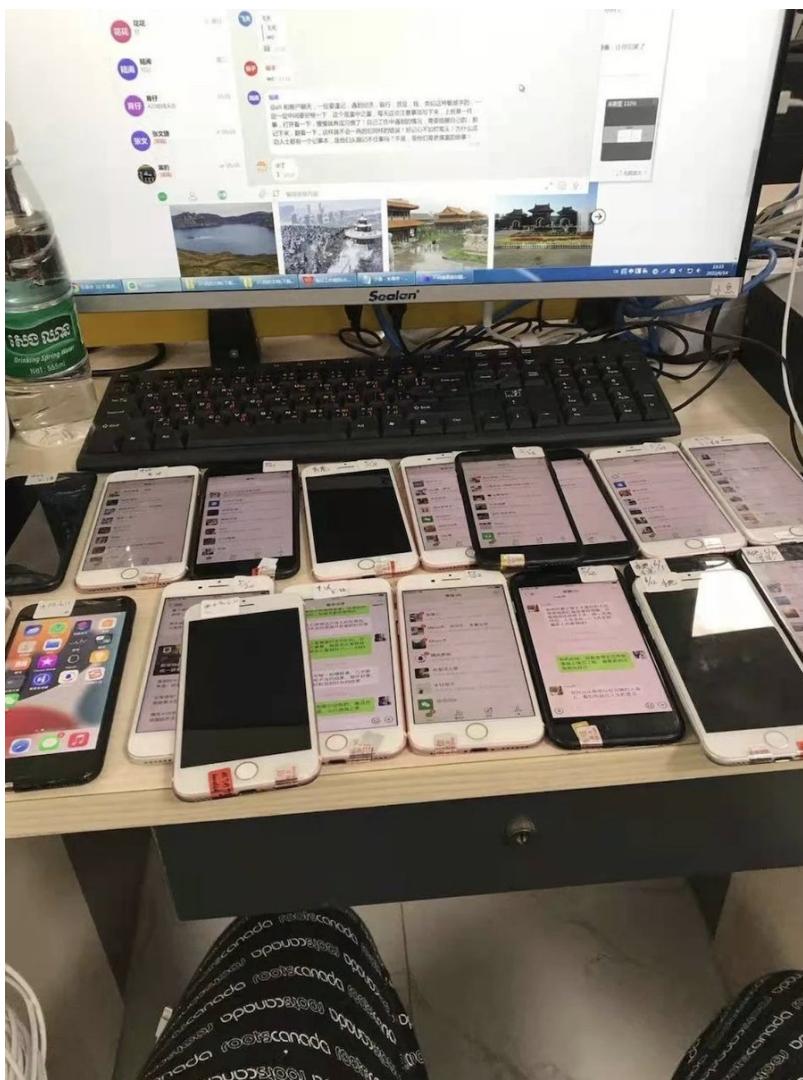
Alan Wong @alanwongw *Thu Jul 14 03:58:10 +0000 2022*

Do you ever get text messages meant for someone else? Maybe sth like "Are you Linda from the pet store?" And because you're nice, you reply and say they got the wrong number.

Cindy Tsai, a lawyer, did just that. By the end of it all, she would lose about \$2.5 million.

This is not just any phone scam, and the scammers aren't the villains you may think they are. We followed the thread and found massive scam centers in Southeast Asia that use forced labor and trafficking victims to carry out fraud of breathtaking scale and sophistication.

It involves criminal syndicates who spent years honing an intricate romance-meets-investment fraud. The pandemic created the perfect conditions for such scams to flourish since early 2020. <https://t.co/druCi7b39a>



What was then a budding Chinese gambling tourism industry in Southeast Asia, in places like Sihanoukville in Cambodia, took a hit from the travel restrictions and an earlier online gambling ban. Businesses that once catered to tourists desperately needed a new source of revenue.

Real estate was repurposed for online scam operations, something we've seen also in Myanmar and Laos. The pandemic created an equally desperate workforce—trafficking victims told us that one scamming center has a "staff" of 7,000 people, though it's unclear how many are willing.

We also spoke with people who were scammed out of their life savings. In such scams, known as "pig butchering," scammers lured their targets into investment schemes (often crypto-related) and earn their trust by giving them real and attractive returns. Why "pig butchering"?

It's an apt analogy. As in pig butchering, you fatten your target before the slaughter. When the victims put real money in, scammers go in for the kill and take off with the funds. They preyed on people like Tsai, who is terminally ill. The human suffering is hard to fathom. <https://t.co/U6ERIVoSaR>



But on the other side of the scam, what we've found is nothing short of a humanitarian crisis. Now, what can be done about this?

Foreign embassies of countries across the region—including Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand—have warned their citizens of the dangers of being lured into scam compounds in Cambodia. Local authorities have acknowledged the issues and said the wrongdoings are "intolerable"

But Lu, a former detainee who escaped a scam center, told us that these compounds have backing from local officials and police chiefs. A provincial deputy governor said his administration doesn't tolerate bribery and corruption.

Read this chilling [@VICEWorldNews](#) investigation by [@AIMcCready1](#), with additional reporting by [@hellokoyu](#) and [@gav_butler](#)

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7zb5d/pig-butchering-scam-cambodia-trafficking>

[@VICEWorldNews](#) [@AIMcCready1](#) [@hellokoyu](#) [@gav_butler](#) P.S. One of my favorite parts of the story:

"There is no un-scammable person," a pig butchering handbook reads. "Only scripts that don't fit."

As someone who recently parted ways with \$30 for a used kitchen trolley that never arrived, this rings true...■

P.P.S. Unrelated to pig butchering, but if you think you're too smart to be scammed, this article is a great read:

I'm a Scam Prevention Expert, and I Got Scammed <https://www.lupinia.net/writing/tech/scammed.htm>