

Prisoner Profile: Zhang Lin

COMPILED BY CAROL K. WANG



Zhang Lin and family

Zhang Lin, a freelance writer and Internet essayist, was born on June 2, 1963, in Huaiyuan County, Anhui Province. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from the physics department of Tsinghua University in 1985.

While at university, Zhang was influenced by the Democracy Wall movement of the 1970s, and he became involved in the 1989 democracy movement as a leader of students and workers. On June 7, 1989, he was arrested and later sentenced to two years in prison for the crime of inciting counterrevolution.

After leaving prison in 1991, Zhang joined Liu Lianchun, Yuan Hongbing and others in establishing a labor organization called the Federation for the Protection of Workers' Rights, and was arrested again on May 26, 1994. After serving three years of Reeducation Through Labor (RTL), Zhang went to America in 1997 and continued his political involvement overseas. Giving in to his desire to rejoin the domestic democracy movement, he reentered China illegally at the end of October 1998. He was arrested soon afterwards and sentenced to another three years of RTL.

Upon his release, Zhang continued to write in support of democracy for China from his home in Bengbu, Anhui Province. He was subjected to constant monitoring and harassment by the police, and was unable to conduct a normal life. He supported himself and his family largely through the payments he received for articles he published overseas. Two of Zhang's articles describing his personal experiences and the situation in Bengbu have been published in previous issues of *China Rights Forum* (No. 1, 2005, and No. 4, 2004).

On January 28, 2005, while attempting to pay his respects to Zhao Ziyang in Beijing, Zhang was detained by police and forced to return to Bengbu on January 29. Upon arrival at the Bengbu train station, he was charged with "disturbing social order," a charge that was later extended to "endangering state security," and was detained at the Anhui Province Bengbu City No. 1 Detention Center. On February 6, a dozen policemen searched Zhang's home and confiscated a computer he had borrowed from a friend, warning his wife that Zhang "would not be treated nicely" if he continued to write criticisms of the Party. He was detained formally on February 15 by the Anhui Province Bengbu City Public Security Bureau, and on March 19, the same authority issued a formal arrest warrant against Zhang.

The Bengbu Municipal People's Procuratorate indicted Zhang in June, stating that he "used the Internet, overseas radio transmissions and other such media to openly disseminate language that misrepresents and denigrates the national authorities and the socialist system, and which incites subversion of state power and the overthrow of the socialist system under Article 105 of China's Criminal Law."

The indictment details Zhang Lin's alleged crime as follows: "During the period between August 2003 and January 2005, the accused, Zhang Lin, posted 192 articles on the Internet Web sites such as Boxun News Net, The Epoch Times, China View and Democracy Forum, with content that violates national sovereignty and territorial integrity, while spreading rumors and disturbing social order." Among the writings cited in the indictment is Zhang's essay "Pangu – The Hysterical Ravings of the Chinese People," which quotes lyrics by a punk rock group: "The Yellow River should run dry, this society should collapse, this system should be destroyed, this race should become extinct, this country should perish." The quotation of this song is included in the indictment as an example of incitement to subvert state power.

Members of Pangu (also known as Punk God), formed in the mid-1990s in Nanchang City, Jianxi Province, received political asylum in Sweden after speaking out in support of Taiwanese independence while performing on the island in February 2004. The uproar over Pangu's actions in Taiwan

was said to have brought this particular essay to prominence in Zhang Lin's trial. The group has since produced a song commemorating Zhang's imprisonment.

Zhang was represented by lawyer Mo Shaoping at his trial before the Bengbu Municipal Intermediate People's Court on June 21, 2005. He pleaded not guilty to the charges, stating that his Internet postings should be protected by his right to free speech. Mo told Agence France Presse that the evidence was based on six articles that Zhang wrote and one interview he gave to "Voice of Hope" radio station. "The case is a matter of freedom of speech. Zhang Lin has the right to air his own views and it doesn't matter if people agree with him or not; this cannot be considered a crime," Mo argued. Only Zhang Lin's wife, mother and sister were allowed to attend the brief trial.

The court issued its judgment against Zhang Lin on July 28, 2005, but Mo Shaping was not notified of the decision until August 2. Zhang was sentenced to five years in prison, with an additional four years' deprivation of rights subsequent to release. The court set his prison term from February 13, 2005 to February 12, 2010.

While in prison, Zhang reportedly suffered mistreatment and was forced to work for 20 hours a day producing Christmas ornaments. On September 6, guards filled Zhang's nostrils with food, causing him to bleed from his nose and mouth. He also suffered from heart problems, which were diagnosed by a doctor when Zhang was finally allowed to visit a hospital. To protest his ill-treatment in prison, Zhang Lin decided to go on hunger strike for 100 days. He fasted from September 1 through September 28, when improved conditions led him to cease his protest.

Zhang Lin's appeal was heard by the Anhui Provincial Higher People's Court on October 14, 2005 in a trial that lasted only about ten minutes. The court upheld the lower court's decision and maintained the original sentence, ruling that this would be the final decision. However, Zhang told his lawyer that he planned to file another appeal with the Supreme People's Court.

Fang Caofang, Zhang's wife, was notified on October 19 that Zhang had been moved to Anhui Hefei Nanjiao Chaiyouji Prison.