

Prisoner Profile: Zhang Ming

COMPILED BY CAI JIQUAN

A native of Jilin Province, Zhang Ming was born in 1965 and enrolled in Tsinghua University in 1984 to study automotive engineering. He became involved in the student protests in the spring of 1989, and eventually took on a leadership role among the protesters at Tiananmen Square.

Following the violent official suppression of the protests on June 4, Zhang Ming organized and led a series of follow-up protest actions that put him on the Chinese government's "Most Wanted" list. He was arrested in Shenzhen on June 26, 1989, and in January 1991 was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of counter-revolutionary incitement.

In April 1991 Zhang was transferred from Beijing's Qincheng Prison to the notorious Lingyuan *laogai* camp in Liaoning Province, where with fellow Tiananmen activist Liu Gang he suffered horrific abuse and torture. Zhang and Liu were among six political prisoners at Lingyuan Prison who attempted to launch hunger strikes over their conditions during a visit to China by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker in November 1991.

Following his release from prison in June 1992, Zhang Ming tried to return to a normal life. He accompanied another Tiananmen activist, Ma Shaofang, to Beijing to find work, but employment was difficult because

of his political background. Eventually Zhang Ming began doing business on his own, and through considerable hard effort built up a successful concern in Shanghai. His An'ge Company, engaged in real estate, investment and technology, grew into a conglomerate with many subsidiaries.

However, sources close to Zhang say his success made him a target of hostility and envy among government officials, in particular because he refused to recant his political principles or express regret for his previous actions. On September 9, 2002, Zhang found himself in custody again, this time on allegations that he was plotting to destroy a multistory building with explosives. He was detained in the Shanghai Municipal Detention Center on charges of "endangering public safety," but it appears that Zhang's obvious dedication to his company led the authorities to realize that the accusation of violent activity could not be supported. On October 16, 2002 Zhang was indicted on an amended charge of "abuse of executive benefits," and on September 26, 2003 the Shanghai No. 1 Intermediate People's Court sentenced him to seven years in prison. Apart from imprisoning Zhang, the relentless official investigation into his company has resulted in heavy financial losses, with most of the subsidiaries either closed or taken over by others.

Zhang Ming has consistently denied guilt, and sources say his court case was riddled with irregularities. Three judges presided over Zhang's first hearing at the Shanghai No. 1 Intermediate People's Court on June 3, 2003, but no witnesses

appeared, and the documents produced as evidence were photocopies. A request by Zhang's lawyer for permission to call a defense witness was denied. Zhang's mother and younger brother were allowed to attend the trial, but the proceedings were otherwise closed to the public on the grounds of anti-SARS precautions. At the second hearing on September 26, 2003, only one of the original three judges presided, and no further legal arguments were presented before the judgment was delivered.

According to sources, one of the chief prosecution witnesses admitted to Zhang Ming's lawyers that the statement he provided against Zhang was false. However, after being warned by the judge that admission of a false statement could land him in prison for three to five years, that witness declined to testify in court on Zhang Ming's behalf. The judge also accused Zhang Ming's lawyer of encouraging the witness to retract his statement, a charge that could result in the lawyer himself being imprisoned. Sources say Zhang's lawyers were also denied access to a large quantity of prosecution evidence at the direction of top officials in the Shanghai government.

While in detention at the Shanghai Municipal Detention Center, Zhang began going on hunger strikes to protest the abuse of process in his case. At one point he was bound to his bed for 113 hours, and was given no opportunity to wash himself or use toilet facilities, causing him considerable humiliation and physical discomfort.

Zhang appealed against his sentence on September 30, 2003, but on January 17, 2004 the Shanghai Supreme Court upheld the original judgment.

Following his sentencing Zhang Ming was transferred to Shanghai's Tilanqiao Prison, where sources say he has experienced great suffering. Zhang began his most recent hunger strike on November 18, 2003, and has been reduced to a skeletal condition after dropping more than 50 pounds in weight. Zhang has received no medical treatment beyond what care is required to sustain his life. Family members report that Zhang remains mentally strong, but that he has begun to complain of memory loss as a result of malnutrition.

Translated by Stacy Mosher



Zhang Ming (far right) with family members