



Prisoner Profile: Zhao Changqing

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Zhao Changqing, aged 34, is currently undergoing his third stint in custody. Zhao's most recent detention began on November 7, 2002, soon after which he was formally charged with "incitement to subvert state power." After more than half a year in detention, Zhao has not yet been brought to trial.

Zhao Changqing was born in rural Shanyang County, Shaanxi Province in April 1969. In September 1988 he began studying history at Shaanxi Normal University. When the democracy movement broke out in Beijing in April 1989, Zhao and other students launched a Students' Autonomous Committee at his school. Zhao took responsibility for promotional activities, and led a group of students to Beijing to support the movement after Premier Li Peng declared martial law on May 19. Soon after the violent crackdown on June 4, Zhao was arrested and sent to Beijing's Qingcheng Prison. After more than four months in prison, Zhao was released and sent back to school, where under the protection of the heads of the history department he was allowed to complete his studies. After graduating in July 1992 Zhao was assigned to a school affiliated with the Nuclear Industrial General Factory No. 813 in Hanzhong, where he taught senior classes.

In August 1997, before the 15th Party Congress, Zhao wrote an essay on political

reform entitled "Reform the Political System, Take the Path to Democratization" and mailed it to the Central Committee and all Provincial Committees. In December of the same year, Zhao tried to run for election as representative to the local People's Congress after a poll he conducted at Factory No. 818 found workers dissatisfied with corruption and substandard working conditions. Zhao gathered 60 nominations, well in excess of the 10 required, but factory officials told him that only Party members of a certain rank could stand for election.

Under pressure to withdraw, Zhao wrote in an open letter to fellow factory workers on January 11, 1998, "You should treasure your own democratic rights. Even if I cannot run as a formal candidate, if you believe I am capable of representing you and of struggling for your interests, then I ask you to write in my name on the ballot. If I am elected, I will be worthy of your trust and will demonstrate my loyalty to you through my actions." Before the ballots could be cast on January 14, Zhao was secretly detained by Hanzhong's Public Security Bureau on suspicion of endangering state security.

The prosecution claimed subversive content in Zhao's campaign leaflets, and also brought up his earlier essay on political reform as evidence against him. In July 1998 the Hanzhong City Intermediate People's Court in Shaanxi sentenced Zhao to three years in prison and one year's deprivation of political rights for incitement to subvert state power, and Zhao was transferred to Hanzhong Prison to begin serving his sentence. Zhao's family members, meanwhile, had never received formal notification of his arrest or detention, and were never informed of the date and length of his sentence, his place of detention or the charges against him. They were not permitted to visit him while he was in prison.

While Zhao was in prison, Factory No. 813 dismissed him, and his *hukou* (residence registration) reverted to his home village in Shanyang County, where he was escorted by police upon completion of his sentence at the end of February 2001. Zhao moved to Xi'an, where he supported himself through a series of odd jobs and in spite of considerable hardships resumed his political activism. When dissident Yang Jianli was arrested, Zhao gathered 170 sig-

natures for a petition demanding Yang's release and distributed it to the international media through Human Rights in China on June 28, 2002.

Early in November 2002, just before China's 16th Party Congress began its meeting on November 8, Zhao drafted an open letter to the Party Congress listing six political demands, including reassessment of the 1989 democracy movement; allowing political exiles to return to China; restoring Zhao Ziyang's political rights and releasing him from house arrest; releasing all prisoners of conscience; pushing the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and bringing domestic law into conformity with international treaties; and expanding democratic elections from the villages and municipalities to national elections. Zhao gathered the signatures of 192 dissidents from all over the country and sent a copy of the open letter to HRIC on November 5, 2002. The open letter, which drew widespread international attention, was the most significant political action by Chinese dissidents in recent years.

On November 7, 2002, Zhao disappeared and police officers from Xi'an's Public Security Bureau searched his home. Police initially replied to frantic inquiries by Zhao's family by denying that he was in detention, but finally on November 27 issued an official notice of criminal detention to Zhao's younger sister. One month later, on December 27, the Xi'an Municipal Public Security Bureau formally charged Zhao with "incitement to subvert state power." Several other signatories of the open letter have also been arrested and charged with subversion.

Zhao was already suffering from tuberculosis at the time of his secret detention, and at one point his condition deteriorated so seriously that Public Security officials transferred him to a prison infirmary. After a few months in the infirmary, Zhao was returned to the Xi'an Public Security Bureau Detention Center, where he currently awaits trial. Zhou's family members have hired a lawyer to conduct his defense, but have not been allowed to visit him up to now. Zhao faces a sentence of up to 15 years if convicted of subversion.