

Prisoner Profile: Wang Xiaoning

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Wang Xiaoning was born on January 7, 1950, in Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning Province. In 1953, his family relocated to Beijing, where he attended primary school. Although the Cultural Revolution began while he was in high school (1966-1968), Wang was not required to enter the Red Guards, as his parents were high-ranking cadres.

Wang worked at a mechanical plant in Shaanxi Province from 1970 to 1973. In January 1973, Wang expressed opinions that were critical of Lin Biao, who at that time was Mao Zedong's chief comrade-in-arms. Wang's views drew the disapproval of the Military Control Committee (*junguan hui zuzhi*), and he narrowly avoided being branded a counterrevolutionary.

That same year, Wang began his university studies at the Huadong Engineering Institute in Nanjing. Throughout his university career, Wang submitted essays to the *People's Daily* advocating the development of production capabilities in Chinese society. In 1976, he openly defended a mass movement in Nanjing mourning the recent death of Premier Zhou Enlai and protesting against the Gang of Four.

After graduating in 1977, Wang was hired by the national division of a working committee for an important research project in which he designed components for a laser navigation system. While employed there, Wang continued to write numerous essays dealing with political and economic matters. In 1986, Wang proposed a "Strategy for the Development of China's Energy Sources," but his suggestions clashed with the views of then-Vice Premier Li Peng, who at that time presided over China's energy industry as Minister of Electric Power and Water Conservancy, and the essay was never published.

In 1989, Wang joined the throngs of protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. When PLA troops and militia launched their crackdown on the protesters in June, Wang was shot and injured. Soon after the incident, Chinese troops found a letter written by Wang on the body of a "hooligan" who had been injured and arrested. The Beijing Public Security Bureau summoned Wang for

interrogation, and he was subsequently labeled a "reactionary." Some time later, Wang wrote an essay entitled, "A Political Manifesto of Democratic Ideology in China," which was sent overseas.

In May 1999, Wang independently compiled an online journal, "The Fire from Stars Can Singe," which promoted democratic ideals and criticized corruption. Key pieces in this journal included essays such as "Reformation of the Chinese Military," "Alteration of the Yellow River" and "The Inevitable Failure of the Three Gorges Project." Three months later, the public security bureau confiscated Wang's possessions without a warrant, on the pretext of "violation of administrative laws."

This did not prevent Wang from continuing his online activities. Beginning in 2000, he submitted essays to Internet journals such as *China Research* and *Popular Topics*. He also created electronic journals through Yahoo! Groups with titles such as "Democratic Reform Free Forum" and "Current Political Commentary." Beginning in August 2001, Wang distributed 25 editions of "Current Political Commentary" through a China-based Yahoo! Group. However, the administrators of this Yahoo! Group noticed the political content of his works, and barred him from further distribution through the group. Wang then sent the next six editions of the commentary to individual members' e-mail addresses. In addition, Wang also sent pieces to overseas Web sites such as "Democracy Forum," in which he advocated democratic reform and criticized the government's repression of peasants and trade union leaders.

On September 1, 2002, the Public Security Bureau conducted a search of Wang's home, confiscating his computer files and email records. He was detained at the Beijing Municipal State Security Bureau Detention Center, and formally arrested on September 30 on the charge of "incitement to subvert state power" under articles 105 and 106 of the PRC Criminal Law. Wang was also accused of endangering state security.

Wang went to trial at Beijing's No. 1 Intermediate People's Court in July 2003. According to the judgment delivered on September 12, 2003, the evidence against him included information provided by Yahoo Holdings (Hong Kong) Ltd. stating that Wang's "aaabbbccc" Yahoo! Group was set up through the mainland China-based email

address bxoguh@yahoo.com.cn. Yahoo Holdings (Hong Kong) Ltd. also confirmed that the email address ahgq@yahoo.com.cn, through which Wang sent messages to the Group, was a mainland China-based account. The judgment does not indicate whether Yahoo Holdings (Hong Kong) Ltd. or Yahoo China provided specific information regarding Wang's identity.

The judgment against Wang lists a number of phrases in his articles deemed objectionable by the authorities, including the following:

- "Without a multi-party system, free elections and separation of powers, any political reform is fraudulent."
- "Never forget that China is still an authoritarian dictatorship."
- "Look at China today—workers and peasants have been suppressed into the lowest level of society. Tens of millions of workers are unemployed and many workers are cruelly exploited and oppressed; they have no right to strike or establish labor unions, and no protection for their most basic rights."
- "The main reason that the Chinese Communist Party has been able to retain power in spite of being so corrupt is that China does not yet have a party that can replace the Communist Party."

Wang was also accused of advocating the establishment of the "China Third Road Party," and of communicating by e-mail with the overseas China Social Democratic Party, which the Chinese government considers a "hostile organization."

On the basis of these offenses, Wang was sentenced to ten years in prison. His appeal to the Supreme People's Court in May 2004 was rejected in December 2004.

Wang is currently being held at Beijing Municipal No. 2 Prison. Throughout his detention and imprisonment, he has been subjected to physical and mental abuse, including being punished with the prison's second-most severe form of solitary confinement, in which he is barred from leaving his cell to walk in the courtyard, or even to go to the bathroom.