

Maoist Writer Jailed for Subversion

The lengthy prison sentence comes amidst a crackdown on calls for political reform in China.



AFP: Police keep watch in Beijing after protesters gather, Feb. 20, 2011.

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Authorities in the central Chinese city of Wuhan have handed a 10-year jail term to Maoist writer Li Tie for subversion, after he wrote articles online calling for political reform and for the human dignity of ordinary people to be respected.

Li was sentenced by the Wuhan Intermediate People's Court, which found him guilty of "incitement to subvert state power" this week, his lawyer and family said.

The sentence, of 10 years' imprisonment and three years' deprivation of political rights, follows hard on the heels of similar jail terms handed down to Sichuan-based activist Chen Wei and Guizhou-based dissident Chen Xi.

However, it was announced nine months after the April 18 trial, which was attended only by Li's mother and daughter, with his brother denied admittance to the courtroom, relatives said.

Li's lawyer, Jin Guangong, said he was informed of the sentence by his client's family, not by the authorities.

"They appointed a government lawyer for him," said Jin, who wasn't allowed to represent Li during the trial. "His brother called me ... to tell me that they had sentenced him to 10 years."

Li was initially detained in September 2010, and formally arrested a month later. His family was denied visits, and the police later pressured Li into accepting the government's choice of a

defense lawyer, his relatives said.

"They haven't given us the judgment document yet," said Li's brother Li Jian in an interview on Thursday. "We haven't received his computer or his cell phone."

"They wouldn't let him have his own lawyer; or rather, they didn't ban him outright but did everything they could to obstruct him, so it was impossible to hire him," he added.

"I stood outside the courtroom because they wouldn't let me in," Li Jian said. "The rest of the people were all police."

'Subversive' writings

The case against Li, 52, rested on 13 articles he wrote, including one entitled "Dignity is the Heaven of the People," which was interpreted by the court as a call for the overthrow of the government in the name of democracy and peaceful evolution.

Li pleaded not guilty to the charges, declaring himself to be an ardent follower of late supreme leader Mao Zedong. "[He says] he studies Mao's writings every day, and that Mao runs through all his writings, and that he is a protector of the Chinese Communist Party."

"He says Mao called for a democratic society, but that something he wrote back in the 1930s is of no use in the 21st century," said Li, who gave the interview in defiance of police warnings not to talk to foreign media.

"Maybe one day you'll try to call me and you won't get through, because I'll be in jail too," he said. "My crime will be talking to the foreign media."

Li's heavy sentence shocked fellow activists.

Wuhan-based veteran pro-democracy activist Qin Yongmin said he was stunned by the sentence. "This is very surprising because this guy shouldn't really have had a problem," he said. "He never took part in any social activism."

"But because of the recent situation, this thing has been blown up out of all proportion," Qin added. "It just goes to show that it's not what you write, it's the circumstances in which you write it."

Ongoing crackdown

China has detained dozens of lawyers, journalists, bloggers, dissidents and rights activists since online protest appeals began circulating in China in mid-February, inspired by a series of uprisings in the Arab world, rights groups say.

While the planned silent walking protests in major cities were sparsely attended, the anonymous calls for a "Jasmine revolution" prompted a nationwide security clampdown that has shown few

signs of easing in recent months, with the authorities sentencing a string of activists to lengthy jail terms for subversion.

The Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) condemned the sentencing in a statement on its website on Thursday.

"On the eve of the one-year anniversary of the online call for 'Jasmine Revolution' protests, the fear factor—the government's panic over sparks of the Arab uprising—can't be any more evident than with the latest string of harsh prison sentences given to activists," said the group's international director Renee Xia.

"Such severe suppression of dissent surely does not address the root causes of increased social unrest," she said.

During the past decade, Li has written many online articles promoting democracy, constitutional government, and direct local elections, CHRD said.

The group said Li had also organized activities to honor the memory of Lin Zhao, a Beijing University student jailed in the 1950s and executed by the government in 1968 for her views and writings.

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