



# World Association of Newspapers

## Case Studies of Journalists Imprisoned in China

1. Cheong Ching, *Straits Times*
2. Li Changqing, *Fuzhou Daily*
3. Huang Jinqiu, Freelance journalist
4. Shi Tao, *Dangdai Shang Bao*
5. Yue Tianxiang, *China Workers Monitor*
6. Zhao Yan, *New York Times*
7. Li Yuanlong, *Bijie Ribao*
8. Wu Zhengyou, *New China Youth*
9. Zhu Wanxiang, *New China Youth*

This dossier compiles cases and supporting evidence of nine journalists who have been jailed for their profession in China in recent years, and who remain behind bars to date. All information found in this document has been drawn from independent news sources and press freedom monitoring bodies and is up to date as of 5 March 2007.



**Cheong Ching, *Straits Times*, Singapore  
Arrested: 22 April 2005**

**Cheong Ching was arrested in Guangzhou, China, on 22 April 2005, and held for a month before Chinese authorities announced that he had allegedly confessed to spying for a foreign intelligence agency. On 31 August 2006, the journalist was convicted to five years in prison for espionage.**

Cheong, who is a Hong Kong citizen and a Singapore permanent resident, is the chief China correspondent for the Singapore-based *Straits Times*. His employer, Singapore Press Holdings, said he has served with distinction as a well-informed correspondent and analyst and that he always conducts himself with utmost professionalism.

Security agents apprehended Cheong on 22 April 2005 in the southern city of Guangzhou, where he was scheduled to meet a source who had promised to give him a copy of recordings of secret interviews with former communist party leader Zhao Ziyang, who died in January while under house arrest for negotiating with demonstrators during the Tiananmen square events in 1989.

After the arrest, Cheong's wife was reportedly warned by the authorities not to disclose her husband's detention, and she agreed to stay silent in the hope he would be released. She decided to go public a few weeks into the journalist's detention after a mainland official reportedly told her in private that the government was preparing to charge him with "stealing core state secrets."

Formal charges were drawn up on 5 August 2005, 106 days after Cheong's arrest. He was charged with passing state secrets to Taiwan over a period of five years. In particular, he was accused of using money provided by Taiwan to purchase political and military information.

In February 2007, Cheong was allowed to meet with his family for the first time since his arrest. Cheong's wife, Mary Lau Man-Yee, who was accompanied by Cheong's elder brother and younger sister during the 30-minute visit, said he seemed in reasonable shape although he had lost a lot of weight and his face had more lines.

Considered to be one of the most knowledgeable reporters covering China, Cheong is the first journalist from Hong Kong to be accused of espionage by the Beijing government since the former British colony's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.



***Li Changqing, Fuzhou Daily  
Arrested: 3 February 2005***

**Li Changqing was sentenced to three years in prison on 24 January 2006, for "spreading false and alarmist information". He had been detained since 3 February 2005.**

The charges against the journalist came in connection to an article he published on the banned Chinese-language website Boxun News, exposing an outbreak of dengue fever in the Fujian province before the authorities officially announced it. It is thought, however, that the real motive behind Li's arrest could have been tied to his support of former Communist Party Secretary and whistleblower Huang Jingao, who was sentenced to life in prison in November 2005 on corruption charges after he exposed official misconduct in an open letter to the Communist Party newspaper, the *People's Daily*.

In August 2004, Huang wrote a letter to the newspaper saying that his efforts to root out bribery had been stymied by a fraternity of corruption in which functionaries on the take protected one another from scrutiny. The statement was posted on the website of the *People's Daily* and caused an immediate stir. The letter was taken down by party censors a few days later, and further press comment was banned.

Li was taken into custody soon after Huang and was accused of helping Huang write the open letter and promote it in articles on overseas websites frequently visited by Chinese dissidents. Initially accused of "subverting the state", this charge against Li was eventually dropped and the journalist was subsequently charged with "spreading false and alarmist information" linked to his report on the outbreak of dengue fever.

According to reports, Li stated before a three-judge court that during more than a year of detention, which he said included torture, his interrogators never asked him about the crime he was charged with. Their questions, Li said, centred on articles he wrote and published on various websites endorsing Huang and his accusations of corruption.

According to Boxun News, in June 2006 an appeal court in the city of Fuzhou upheld the three-year prison sentence. For the first time since his arrest, Li's wife was reportedly able to visit him on 15 June 2006.



***Huang Jinqiu, freelance journalist***  
***Arrested: 13 September 2003***

**In September 2004, Huang was sentenced to twelve years in prison and four years' deprivation of civil rights for "organizing, planning and carrying out subversive activities" and for writing "reactionary" articles on the internet.**

The journalist had been detained since 13 September 2003, but his arrest was not reported until mid-December 2003 and even then remained little publicised outside the Chinese-language media. His detention was not officially acknowledged by the Chinese authorities until January 2004.

At the age of 18, Huang began working as a journalist and editor of several newspapers and magazines, including *YangCheng WanBao*, a well-known daily newspaper in Guangdong. The journalist published his first book when he was 20 years old. He is a graduate of Beijing's respected Lu Xun Literature Institute and the University of Lincoln in the United Kingdom.

After winning a scholarship to study journalism, Huang relocated to Malaysia in 2000 to attend the Central Academy of Art. While abroad, he wrote under the pen name Qing Shuijun (Mr. Clear Water) for the U.S.-based Chinese-language news website Boxun News. His essays and posts made him well known in the Chinese internet community and resulted in the publication of two volumes: the first containing non-political material under his real name, and the second containing political material, printed under his pen name.

In January 2003, Huang announced his intention to found the China Patriot Democracy Party (CPDP). Although the CPDP never materialized, he started being followed by police upon his return to China in August 2003. In early September, Huang travelled to Shangdong Province to visit his parents; his last article, titled "Me and My Public Security Friends," was published on 10 September. He was arrested three days later in Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province.

The journalist's trial began on 22 June, 2004 at the Changzhou Intermediate People's Court. The court was reportedly unable to reach an initial verdict because of a lack of evidence. However, after the case was referred back to the prosecution, further evidence eventually led to his conviction on 27 September, 2004.

At least two attempts at appeal have been rejected; the first without hearing, and the second in March 2005, when the Shanghai Department of Justice suspended the license of his lawyer, Guo Guoting, for speaking against the Communist Party.

Huang is being held in Pukou Prison, near Nanjing City, from where he is reportedly editing the prison's newsletter.

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**Shi Tao, *Dangdai Shang Bao*  
Arrested: 24 November 2004**

Shi Tao is a correspondent for the daily *Dangdai Shang Bao* (Contemporary Business News), based in the southern province of Hunan. He is currently serving a ten-year prison sentence after being charged with “leaking state secrets” after he wrote an email about media restrictions in the lead up to the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

In April 2004, Shi made public information that had been sent to his newspaper by the Chinese authorities, warning journalists of the dangers of social destabilisation and risks linked to the return of certain dissidents to China on the occasion of the commemoration of the massacre. He sent the email from his personal Yahoo account. The e-mail was picked up by several overseas Internet portals. It was also picked up by the Chinese authorities, with the assistance of the Yahoo Internet Service Provider, which reportedly gave state security authorities details about Shi's e-mail usage that ultimately allowed them to trace the message to a computer he used at the newspaper.

When asked about Yahoo's involvement, Yahoo's co-founder Jerry Yang said his company had no choice but to cooperate with the authorities. "To be doing business in China, or anywhere else in the world, we have to comply with local law," Yang said responding to a question about his company's role in the case. "We don't know what they want that information for, we're not told what they look for. If they give us the proper documentation and court orders, we give them things that satisfy both our privacy policy and the local rules."

Officials detained Shi near his home in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, on 24 November 2004, confiscating his computer and warning his family to stay quiet about the matter. On 27 April 2005, Changsha Intermediate People's Court found the journalist guilty of “leaking state secrets” and sentenced him to a ten year prison term. On 2 June, the Hunan Province High People's Court rejected Shi's appeal without giving the journalist a hearing.



**Yue Tianxiang, *China Workers Monitor*  
Arrested: January 1999**

**Yue Tianxiang was arrested in January 1999 and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in July 1999 for 'subverting state power', after setting up a labour rights journal to defend the rights of laid-off workers.**

Yue is a workers rights activist and a former journalist with the *Chinese Workers' Monitor*, a now disbanded underground publication that was dedicated to fighting for the rights of current, and dismissed, Chinese workers.

Yue was detained in 1999 and charged with subversion for his work on the underground publication. Guo Xinmin and Wang Fengshan, two colleagues of Yue's who worked with him to publish the journal, were also also arrested.

Yue was sentenced to ten years in prison for subversion. Guo and Wang were sentenced to two years imprisonment for their part in the publication, and have since been released.

Yue also organized workers into taking legal action to secure the payment of wage arrears from the Tianshui Transport Company. Yue had been laid-off by the state-owned Tianshui City Transport Company in 1995 while being owed three months back pay. Yue and his colleagues took the case to the Tianshui Labour Disputes and Arbitration Committee (LDAC). They were arrested just after writing a petition to President Jiang Zemin asking for an official intervention. The petition was also sent to international news agencies.

Yue was also allegedly a member of the banned China Democracy Party.



**Zhao Yan, *The New York Times*  
Arrested: 17 September 2004**

**Zhao Yan, a researcher for *The New York Times*, was arrested on 17 September 2004 in relation to an article that appeared in the publication ten days earlier that predicted the retirement of former president Jiang Zemin from his post on the Central Military Commission. Zhao was indicted with revealing state secrets. He was also indicted on a lesser charge of fraud at a later stage in the investigation.**

Zhao was held in detention for more than two years while authorities were conducting investigations into the case. No immediate public explanation was given for Zhao's arrest and he was reportedly forbidden to see his family in the months following his arrest. His lawyer's efforts to post bail were denied not by a judge but by the Ministry of State Security, the agency that arrested Zhao.

The *New York Times* has stated that Zhao did not provide any information about Jiang's resignation and a confidential state security report on the case reportedly does not accuse Zhao of doing so. Instead, the key evidence is a photocopy of a note Zhao wrote two months before the 7 September article, which makes no mention of Jiang's resignation.

The note reportedly remains in the Beijing office of the *New York Times*, raising questions about whether state security agents induced a Chinese employee of the office to provide the photocopy without authorization or conducted a search without permission. In either case, under Chinese law, the photocopy would be inadmissible as evidence.

On 17 March 2006, the Beijing intermediate people's court No. 2 announced that the charges against the researcher were to be dropped. However Zhao was never released from prison, and prosecutors issued new indictments against him in the following weeks.

It was announced on 25 August 2006 that the charge against Zhao of revealing state secrets were dropped, however the journalist was reportedly sentenced to three years in jail for fraud.

In November 2006, the Beijing High Court refused Zhao an appeal hearing. Zhao's previous work as a muckraking journalist and rural activist earned him regular visits from state security agents. At the time of his arrest, Zhao was working as a researcher for the *New York Times'* bureau in Beijing.



***Li Yuanlong, Bijie Ribao***  
***Arrested: 9 September 2005***

**Li Yuanlong was arrested in September 2005 for a series of articles he posted on the internet that criticised living standards in China and advocated for democracy. The journalist was detained until his sentencing on 13 July 2006, when he was convicted for ‘inciting subversion of state authority’ and handed a two-year prison sentence.**

Li, who uses the pen name Ye Lang (Night Wolf), wrote a number of articles for a number of U.S.-based Chinese language websites, including Boxun News, Epoch Times, ChinaEWeekly and New Century Net. The websites are banned in China. Two articles in particular were cited by Chinese prosecutors as being of particular concern: "In my mind, I am an American" and "Common birth, tragic death".

Li was arrested by officers of the security bureau in Guizhou province in south-west China and his personal property was confiscated. While in detention, the journalist’s case was transferred among several prosecutors and it was not until 9 February 2006 that he was officially accused for "instigating subversion of state power." The court hearing was also delayed three times, and was finally held on 11 May. Li was formally sentenced by Bijie Intermediate People’s Court on 13 July 2006. He is appealing the sentence.

Just prior to his conviction, Li stated in an interview with his lawyer: “I am a journalist for party newspapers. I write lies and clichés all day and I feel repressed. I want to be able to say what I think... The reality inside China is about inequality of wealth, corruption of officials, unjust administration of law, restriction of speech, etc... As an intellectual, I have the obligation to criticise and expose these phenomena.”

Li Yuanlong was a reporter for the daily *Bijie Ribao*. The journalist, 45, was known for his reporting on rural poverty in his native Guizhou Province. Li is currently being held in Bijie Detention Centre without access to family visits, and is said to be in very poor health.



**Zhu Wanxiang and Wu Zhengyou, *New China Youth*  
Arrested: August 2005**

**Zhu Wanxiang and Wu Zhengyou were convicted of illegal publishing, fraud, and extortion after they reported on land disputes in the *Zhonghua Xin Qingnian* magazine (New China Youth). The journalists were sentenced to ten and six years in prison respectively on 17 January 2006.**

As editors of New China Youth, Zhu and Wu had reported on villagers' protests over government seizure of land for development and a violent demonstration in the city of Lishui in May 2005. Two of the articles in question were particularly provocative. The first was titled "Appeal of the Peasants" and the second "When Power Replaces Law, What Happens to the Law? Return Our Human Rights." Both articles appeared during a time of heightened tensions between villagers and local authorities.

Zhu and Wu were charged with extorting money from rural villagers and government officials while reporting. They were also convicted of illegally raising funds for the magazine.

The journalists were detained in August 2005. Authorities claimed that Zhu and Wu forged journalist accreditation and illegally published their magazine. Zhu had registered the New China Youth Join Company Ltd in Hong Kong in August 2002, but the magazine was not registered in China.

The journalists were also reportedly convicted of raising 3 million yuan (US\$240,000) in investment funds for the *Zhonghua Xin Qingnian*. This was deemed illegal fundraising since it was not registered.

The two journalists were tried on 28 December 2005, along with another colleague at the Liandu district court in the city of Lishui, Zhejiang Province.