



Prisoner Profile:

Yang Jianli

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On August 4, 2003, after being detained for more than 15 months, U.S.-based activist Yang Jianli was tried by the Beijing No. 2 Intermediate People's Court in closed proceedings on charges of espionage and illegally entering the country. Yang Jianli's family and officials of the U.S. embassy in Beijing were refused permission to attend the trial, which lasted for three hours with no verdict yet delivered.

Yang Jianli, 39, is president of the Foundation for China in the 21st Century, a group advocating nonviolent democratization in China. In early 2002, laid-off factory workers mounted large-scale protests in Liaoyang and other cities in the industrial northeast, alleging corruption and other abuses at bankrupt state-owned factories. The demonstrations led to the arrest of several protest organizers. Yang wrote articles arguing that the Chinese government had accused protesters in Liaoyang of collaborating with "overseas hostile forces" as a way of minimizing public sympathy for the workers and driving a wedge between democracy activists inside and outside of the country. He urged overseas democracy activists to "charge or sneak into China to coordinate" with domestic activists. He himself attempted to do exactly that.

On April 18, 2002, Yang Jianli flew from Boston to Beijing, then traveled to Liaoyang

and other cities in the northeast to investigate the situation of the labor protesters. When he went south and tried to purchase an airline ticket in Kunming, Yunnan Province on April 26, he was detained by police when discovered using a friend's passport. Yang was taken to a hotel near Kunming airport, where he called his wife Christina Fu Xiang and told her he was being guarded by two police officers. That was the last Fu heard from her husband.

For almost the entire period of Yang's detention, until shortly before his trial, his family was not informed of the reasons for his detention or where he was being held. Desperate to ascertain Yang's whereabouts, Christina Fu left the United States for China on May 21, 2002, but was detained upon arrival in Beijing on May 22. After being held for two hours she was sent back to the United States. Christina Fu is a naturalized American citizen and had a valid entry visa to China when she traveled to Beijing.

On June 21 Yang's older brother, Yang Jianjun, who lives in Shandong Province, was informed by the Public Security Bureau of Linyi City that Yang Jianli had been arrested on June 2 and was being detained in a jail in Beijing. But the police did not say exactly where Yang was being held or on what charges. Yang Jianjun traveled to Beijing to find out more about his brother's situation, but after spending a week inquiring at the Beijing Public Security Bureau and other government offices he received no further information regarding his brother's place of detention, nor was he provided with a copy of Yang's formal arrest warrant. In China, a lawyer cannot accept a case without a formal notice of arrest. Christina Fu also made every effort to deal with the appropriate authorities on her husband's behalf, but she was denied any formal documentation. As a result of the police failure to follow procedures, Fu was unable to hire a lawyer for her husband.

On July 1, 2002, the U.S. Department of State informed Fu that the American embassy in Beijing had received notification from the Chinese Foreign Ministry that Yang Jianli had been formally arrested on June 21, but had not yet been charged. On February 13, 2003, Yang's family hired Chinese criminal defense lawyer Mo Shaoping to represent Yang, but Mo was not allowed to meet with his client until July

8, 2003, more than 14 months after Yang was detained. On July 17, 2003, the Chinese government indicted Yang Jianli on charges of espionage and illegally entering China. Represented by lawyer Mo Shaoping in court, Yang Jianli pleaded not guilty on August 4, 2003.

A native of Shandong Province, Yang Jianli is a U.S. permanent resident. He came to the United States in 1986 to study at the University of California at Berkeley after earning his M.S. degree in Mathematics at Beijing Normal University. When the democracy movement broke out in Beijing in 1989, Yang returned briefly to China to participate in the protests in Tiananmen Square. In 1991 Yang earned his Ph.D. degree in Mathematics from Berkeley, and in 2001 completed a second Ph.D. from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

In the meantime Yang established the Foundation for China in the 21st Century in San Francisco in 1990. The organization operates a Web site (www.china21century.org) and publishes books and a weekly electronic newsletter (www.chinaeweekly.com), which has continued in Yang's absence.

Because of his political activism, Yang's name was included on a police blacklist of 49 Chinese citizens living overseas who are barred from reentering the country. When Yang's Chinese passport expired, he went to the Chinese consulate to renew it in 1996 and again in 1999, but was refused. After 13 years in exile, Yang decided to "exercise his right to return home," only to end up in custody.

Since Yang's arrest, members of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, U.S. government officials, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Amnesty International and other organizations, including Human Rights in China, have called for Yang's release.

Yang is currently being held at the Beijing Public Security Bureau Detention Center awaiting delivery of a verdict.