

## Chinese Activist Five Year Jail Sentence

SOH Network

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On Feb 9, Chinese activist and writer Tan Zuoren was sentenced to five years in prison on charges of “inciting subversion of state power,” allegedly for his online comments regarding the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Tan’s supporters say the charges were really aimed at silencing his investigation into corruption in the construction of school buildings in Sichuan.

There were 14,000 school buildings damaged in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, according to official Chinese government statistics. Tan was exposing information that, in many cases, the schools collapsed while adjacent buildings remained standing. In some districts, schools were the only buildings that fell.

Tan had also been collating information on students who lost their lives in the earthquake, attempting to arrive at an accurate student death toll.



*Chinese activist Tan Zuoren (Sound of Hope)*

“That is what really made the officials panic,” Ran Yunfei, a writer from Sichuan, told Sound of Hope.

“Whatever Tan was working on had nothing to do with subversion. It was about exposing corrupt local officials,” Ran said.

Tan’s lawyer, Pu Zhiqiang, says the 56-year-old activist was convicted based on his email correspondence with an overseas activist for democracy. In an email, Tan discussed China’s brutal crackdown on student protesters at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

The verdict was handed down by the Chengdu Intermediate People's Court. “We filed an appeal, but the court sent a notice saying there will not be a second trial,” Pu said.

### **Journalists harassed**

*Amnesty International* reported that journalists attempting to cover the trial were harassed by authorities. Two journalists from Hong Kong were detained in their hotel room under the guise of a drug search. Supporters of Tan were barred from entering the courtroom.

Defense witness, internationally acclaimed artist Ai Weiwei, was beaten and illegally detained until the trial was over by uniformed individuals who identified themselves as police .

In February 2009, Tan called for public action on his civil investigation into the construction quality of school buildings and was arrested the following March. The trial in August 2009, following four months of illegal detention, ended without a verdict.

"Even one day of imprisonment is too much. He only exercised his freedom of expression and addressed corruption from his own conscience," Tan Zuoren's wife, Wang Qinghua, told .