

China Rights Lawyer Convicted with Suspended Jail Sentence



Summary: *Rights Lawyer Pu Zhiqiang receives his sentence from last week's trial.*

After a highly publicized one-day trial [last week](#), Chinese authorities have decided the fate of rights lawyer Pu Zhiqiang. He is to receive a suspended three-year sentence. He faced up to 8 years in prison, and this specifically for seven tweets he made on the Twitter-like Weibo platform between July 2011 and May 2014, which criticized government officials and their handling of ethnically-divided Tibet and Xinjiang.

Though he has finally gone home, after falling sick in jail – he was imprisoned a year ago without charges – he will not have to face further imprisonment. Nevertheless, though the sentence was suspended, he can no longer by law practice as a lawyer.

“We of course hoped he would be acquitted of charges,” said Lawyer Shao Baojun, “but we knew the chance was slim.” Though they have twenty days to appeal the verdict, they have decided not to.

As State news agency Xinhua explained during his sentencing, Mr. Pu “acknowledged the reality of his crimes,” and both apologized, and with Socratic resolve, accepted his sentence. He never pleaded guilty, nevertheless.

The specific charges have been criticized as vague: “picking quarrels,” and “inciting ethnic hatred.” The U.S. Embassy in Beijing stated on December 13 that Pu “should not be subject to continuing repression.”

He himself did not foresee the government crackdown on dissidents would make an example of him. He said in a 2013 interview with CNN, “I think I’m fine. I’m a moderate, and the government has treated me well. I’m a veteran lawyer and haven’t made mistakes in my career. I’m not radical and I don’t threaten the government.”

China, for their part, would minimize the international import of the trial, while letting it stand as a warning for other dissidents. Foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said the case had been handled “in accordance with the law,” and that “foreign governments should respect China’s judicial sovereignty.”

What incited the government against Pu specifically may or may not be the handful of texts he made. Those [texts](#) questioned the “excessively violent” fight against the Uighurs in the Xinjiang region, and even insinuated the Chinese Communist Party was untruthful.

But Pu had become representative of human rights freedom fighting. He was known for defending freedom of speech, and campaigned for an abolition of the labor camp system, which puts suspects into confinement for years without trial.

As a visible and well known figure expressing the values of freedom of speech, many are viewing his detention and trial as politically motivated, and designed solely to intimidate other freedom fighters.

Source: [CNN](#)