Free China Movement

Free China Movement Statement on the Prosecution of Tang Haoming, a 1989 Participant, Over Two Water Pipes

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The Free China Movement calls on the PRC authorities in Huaihua, Hunan, to immediately release Tang Haoming (唐浩铭) and drop the theft prosecution against him. A participant in the 1989 democracy movement is being prosecuted over two water pipes worth barely 2,000 yuan — after the family secured the owner's forgiveness. The charge is, in our judgment, a pretext. The pattern points to a different reason: his thirty-seven years of speaking out.

Tang Haoming, born in 1968, is an architect and hydropower engineer, a poet, and a participant in the 1989 democracy movement. As a first-year university student in 1989, he was imprisoned for three years for taking part in the movement. He has been punished for speaking out ever since: a year in prison in 1999; seven days of residential surveillance in Jiangxi in 2013, on the eve of the June 4 anniversary; a formal admonition by state security in 2014 for supporting the dissident Qin Yongmin; five days of administrative detention in June 2024 for forwarding a video commemorating June 4. In July 2025 he was taken back from a Beijing construction site by officials from his home district. His WeChat fell silent on August 30, 2026; his X account, @sugar63544232, last updated on August 27.

On September 1, 2026, police from the Chengnan Police Station in Hecheng District, Huaihua, took him away. The family was told he had picked up two water pipes from the roadside at a construction site, believing them discarded. The family located the unit the pipes belonged to and obtained a letter of forgiveness; the invoice for the two pipes was barely more than 2,000 yuan. That should have ended the matter. Instead, the Chengzhong Police Station insisted on criminal detention and prosecution.

The sequence points to a political motive. Tang was first placed under administrative detention from September 2 to September 14. On September 14 — the very day that detention expired — he was criminally detained on suspicion of theft, under detention notice 怀鹤公（城中）拘通字[2026]0475 号, and is now held at the Huaihua Detention Center. The case has been transferred to the Hecheng District People's Procuratorate. His family's lawyer has repeatedly applied for bail and repeatedly been refused; the lawyer has repeatedly sought to meet the lead prosecutor and repeatedly been refused. The reason given, each time, is his "great social harm" — a political judgment, not a legal one.

Three facts make the conclusion unavoidable. First, the amount is trivial and the owner forgave him; no ordinary theft case of 2,000 yuan, with a forgiveness letter in hand, would ordinarily be pursued to

prosecution. Second, the detention was escalated step by step — administrative detention, then criminal detention the moment the first expired — the pattern of a man being kept locked up while a charge is found for him. Third, the bail refusals rest on "social harm," the language of political punishment, not of flight risk or evidence tampering. Set against thirty-seven years in which every act of speech brought a new punishment, the theft charge is not a criminal case. It is the latest instrument of retaliation against a man who has never stopped speaking.

Tang is not only a 1989 participant. Since 1994 he has written poetry, founded the Yangziwan Poetry Society and its journal, and in 2003 founded the China Contemporary Poetry Forum and its journal — later shut down by the authorities. He is an engineer, a poet, and a citizen who has paid, again and again, for refusing to be silent. The PRC authorities have now reached for the pettiest charge available to silence him once more.

The Free China Movement calls on the Huaihua police and the Hecheng District People's Procuratorate to release Tang Haoming immediately, drop the prosecution, and grant his lawyer access and bail. We call on human rights organizations, the media, and all who care about the human rights situation in mainland China to keep attention on Tang Haoming's case and his health, and to speak out until he is free. A man should not lose his freedom over two pipes worth 2,000 yuan — and no one should be prosecuted for thirty-seven years of telling the truth.

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