Chinese student jailed for life in UK for drugging, raping 10 women

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An undated handout photo released by Britain's Metropolitan Police in London on June 6, 2025 shows the custody image of Zhenhao Zou. A Chinese student who drugged and raped 10 women in the UK and China was jailed for life on June 19, 2024 with a minimum term of 22 years. Passing sentence, UK judge Rosina Cottage said that to the world Zhenhao Zou, 28 appeared "well to do, ambitious and charming" but this was in fact a mask hiding a "sexual predator". (Photo by Metropolitan Police / AFP)  
  
A Chinese post-graduate student convicted of drugging and raping 10 women in the UK and China and suspected of having attacked more was on Thursday jailed for life by a London court.  
  
Police in London say they have evidence to suggest he may have targeted more than 50 other women.  
  
Serial rapist Zhenhao Zou, 28 — described in court as “calculated and predatory” — targeted young Chinese women whom he invited to his London flat for drinks or to study before drugging and attacking them.  
  
Zou filmed nine of the rapes with hidden or handheld cameras, but only three of the 10 victims have ever been identified.  
  
Sentencing him at Inner London Crown Court, Judge Rosina Cottage said there was “no doubt that you planned and executed a campaign of rape” that had caused “devastating and long term effects”.  
  
To the world he appeared “well to do, ambitious and charming” but this was a mask hiding a “sexual predator”, she said.  
  
He treated his victims “callously” as “sex toys” for his own gratification, and his desire to assert “power and control over women” meant that he would be a “risk for an indefinite period”, she added.  
  
Zou, wearing a dark suit and glasses, listened impassively in the dock to the sentence via a translator. He will serve a minimum of 22 years in jail, after accounting for time already spent in custody.  
  
The former engineering student at University College London was found guilty by a jury in March of 28 offences including 11 counts of rape — with two of the counts relating to one woman — three counts of voyeurism and one of false imprisonment.  
  
He was found guilty of raping three women in London and seven in China between 2019 and 2023.  
  
He was also convicted of three counts of possessing butanediol — an industrial solvent — with intent to commit a sexual offence and 10 counts of possession of an extreme pornographic image.  
  
– ‘Prolific’ rapist –  
  
Victims told the sentencing hearing in impact statements of the psychological damage they suffered including nightmares, self harm and a sense of despair and isolation.  
  
One recalled “wandering like a trapped animal trying to find an exit” after she was attacked.  
  
“What happened that night is etched into my soul forever,” she said, adding that Zou’s family was “very powerful in China” and she feared he would “seek revenge”.  
  
After the sentence, Saira Pike of the Crown Prosecution Service described Zou as a “serial rapist and a danger to women”.  
  
“His life sentence reflects the heinous acts and harm he caused to women and the danger he posed to society.”  
  
Analysis of footage and web chats showed the former student’s “meticulous planning and the horrifying execution of his crimes”.  
  
And Pike paid tribute to the “courageous women” who came forward to report his “horrific crimes” and whose evidence — combined with his own videos — helped secure his conviction and life sentence.  
  
Since he was convicted, and following an international appeal by UK police, some 24 women had come forward to say they might have been sexually assaulted by Zou.  
  
London’s Met police have said they have evidence to suggest he may have targeted more than 50 other women and urged possible victims to come forward, adding that he had also studied in Belfast in Northern Ireland in 2017.  
  
“Our investigation remains open and we continue to appeal to anyone who may think they have been a victim of Zou,” said Commander Kevin Southworth of the Metropolitan Police.  
  
“Please come forward and speak with our team -– we will treat you with empathy, kindness and respect.”  
  
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