

Open Letter of European Sinologists on the detention of Journalist Gao Yu and other Chinese civil rights activists

Sunday 25 May 2014, by [KEEN Ruth](#), [MULLER-HOFSTEDTE Christoph](#), [PESCHEL Sabine](#), [ROETZ Heiner](#), [RUDOLPH Jörg-M.](#), [SATTTLER Martin](#), [TIENCHI Martin-Liao](#), [von SIVERS-SATTTLER Gabriele](#) (Date first published: 19 May 2014).

It is with great dismay that in the weeks ahead of June 4, the day of commemoration for the democracy movement of 1989, we are witnessing an increasing repression of critical voices in China by the Chinese authorities. One of these voices is Gao Yu, an internationally recognized, award-winning journalist, who has been detained for allegedly leaking state secrets to foreign countries.

Gao Yu, a member of the Independent Chinese PEN Center, has been a contributor to the Chinese program of Germany's international broadcaster Deutsche Welle. DW General Director Peter Limbourg has sharply criticized Gao Yu's detention. It was "beneath human dignity", Limbourg said, to parade her to millions of television viewers as a confessed criminal. He expressed grave concern for the reputation of the 70-year-old journalist and stressed her right to fair treatment in compliance with the rule of law. Along with Gao Yu, her son has also gone missing. It is believed that he is held in the same detention center as leverage against his mother.

This is the third time that Gao Yu has been targeted by authorities. In 1989, she was jailed for over one year because she had expressed sympathy with the student demonstrators on Tiananmen Square. Because she was no longer allowed to publish in China, she since then wrote for international media. In 1993, she was condemned to six years in prison for "revealing state secrets" to a Hong Kong magazine. She was released from jail after approximately 5 years, apparently because her health was deteriorating.

In August 2013, the Hong Kong-based *Mingjing Monthly* published the Party directive "Document No. 9," which warns against the spread of so called "Western values" in China and among other things places severe ideological taboos on "seminars and university classrooms". Put into practice, these restrictions would not only mean a grave curtailment on the freedom of opinion and expression in China, but also an impediment for the cooperation between China and the world in the scientific field. Allegedly, Gao Yu stands accused of leaking this "state secret" to foreign contacts. If this is true, it is hard to understand how a Party document on ideology should count as a state secret. Furthermore, according to information found on the internet, this document has been disseminated online since May 2013—three months before Gao supposedly leaked it to the public.

On May 6, 2014, several participants of a privately organized "June 4 seminar" were jailed in Beijing, among them the lawyer Pu Zhiqiang, the writers Liu Di and Hu Shigen, and the academics Hao Jian and Xu Youyu. They are charged with "causing a disturbance".

Furthermore, on May 7, a court in Shenzhen gave Hong Kong publisher Yao Wentian a 10-year prison sentence for "smuggling". It is widely believed that the sentence is politically motivated, since Yao Wentian has published several books critical of the leadership of the Communist Party.

During the last decades, China has developed into a first rank political and economic power with

ever-growing responsibility for the global community. The critical voices of her intellectuals is a valuable and indispensable force for safeguarding the progress of her society. The aforementioned activists are internationally recognized advocates of democracy and the rule of law who are concerned about the future of their country. By this open letter, we appeal to the Chinese authorities for their immediate release as well as the release of all other dissidents who have become victims of unjust accusations and verdicts. To give them back their freedom would be a sign of China's political strength.

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Signatory

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