

Circle 19's Statement of Principles for the Right to Information in China

Preamble

We, the participants of Circle 19 for the Right to Information in China, an independent group composed of media practitioners and experts from the Chinese diaspora and the international community, commend the struggle of the public in the People's Republic of China (PRC) to exercise their right to information. Basing our reflections on our first-hand media practice experiences and academic research works,

We state the following

The right to information is an integral part of Chinese legacy

The right to information, together with the freedom of speech necessary to exert this right, has been continuously pursued throughout China's intellectual and political history, and was at the heart of the demands expressed by the Chinese Enlightenment and May Fourth humanist movements in the beginning of the 20th century.

Chinese intellectuals widely contributed to the drafting of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), signed and recognised by China, and whose Article 19 proclaims the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas." In 1998, the PRC also signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that reaffirms this right.

The full exercise of the right to information remains a fundamental aspiration of the people in the PRC as shown by the demands expressed during the 1978 Democracy Wall movement, the 1989 Tiananmen democracy movement, the 2013 Citizens' Solidarity with Southern Weekly event, the 2014 and 2019-2020 Hong Kong pro-democracy protests, and the 2022 Blank Paper protests.

The one-party state exerts a malign influence on the free flow of information

China's one-party state exerts a malign influence on the free flow of information, both domestically and globally, and justifies its abuses through an

erroneous and dangerous narrative that denies the universality of human rights and turns them into "Western values" supposedly incompatible with Chinese culture.

Domestically, the one-party state exercises media control, censorship, surveillance accompanied by violent repression against independent journalists and press freedom defenders. This dramatically reduces the possibility for the public to seek, access, receive and impart reliable and pluralistic information.

Globally, the PRC's authorities are striving to impose their biased narrative through massive-scale propaganda and disinformation, thus impeding the international public's ability to properly understand China-related issues.

The scarcity of reliable information poses a threat to China's future

The scarcity of reliable information deprives the PRC public of the full exercise of civil and political rights, which also hinders the possibility of healthy public debate essential to exposing the abuse of power and addressing social issues.

The information blackout undermines trust in government and allows the one-party state's effort to evade its duty of transparency and accountability.

The one-party state's censorship and propaganda work not only threaten institutions but also the economic development of the country, as sustainable investment requests confidence in the integrity of the information available.

We pledge our support to the people in the PRC

By providing factual information to counter the biased narrative propagated by the one-party state.

By providing resources to facilitate access to independent information despite the multiple barriers put in place by the one-party state.

By promoting worldwide intellectual references supporting the legitimacy of their struggle to fully exercise their right to information.

We urge the international community to support the people in the PRC

By firmly combatting narratives denying the public's legitimate aspiration to enjoy the right to information in the name of an alleged "cultural relativism."

By providing all possible support to civil society and journalists so that they can fully exchange information inside and outside of the PRC.

By pressuring the one-party state to dismantle the legal and technological apparatus enabling censorship and repression, and to release all detained journalists and press freedom defenders.

**Collectively written by
Circle 19 participants.**



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