

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2017		86	Iran	Xiyue Wang
	2017			
	2018			
	2019			

Announcement

This is the fourth appeal of the Network of Concerned Historians (NCH) for Chinese-born American history student Xiyue Wang. Today marks three years since Iranian authorities arrested him; he has been wrongfully imprisoned ever since. We ask you to join Scholars at Risk (SAR) in calling for his immediate release.

**Download the SAR template letter [here](#) (indirectly via the SAR website) or [here](#) (directly as a text in Word).

**For a link to the four NCH circulars in the case, click [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Please find below a NCH summary of the case.

NCH SUMMARY OF THE CASE (as of 7 August 2019)

On 7 August 2016, **Xiyue Wang** ([1980–]), a fourth-year graduate student in the Department of History at Princeton University and a China-born naturalized United States citizen since 2009, was detained and confined to Evin Prison in Tehran while in Iran since January 2016 to study Farsi and do Ph.D. research into late 19th and early 20th century Eurasian history, particularly comparing governance practices across multiple countries. After he left Iran he was planning to continue his research in Russia. Wang's research had been approved by the Iranian government, allowing him to review old texts (mostly newspaper clippings published between 1880 and 1921) that had nothing to do with contemporary Iranian politics and were not confidential. Wang was interested in archives about the administrative and cultural history

of the Qajar dynasty (1785–1925) in Tehran and Mashhad. He spent his first eighteen days in solitary confinement. In February 2017, Wang was charged with “espionage” and “collaboration with [a hostile state]”, widely believed to be fabricated. In April 2017 the Revolutionary Court convicted him and sentenced him to ten years’ imprisonment. On 16 July 2017, the judiciary’s Mizan News Agency said that he was “sent” by Princeton University to “infiltrate” Iran, that he had connections to American and British intelligence agencies. The agency also declared that Wang had illicitly scanned 4,500 pages of digital documents and had done “highly confidential research for the U.S. Department of State, Harvard Kennedy School and British Institute of Persian Studies.” Wang’s appeal of his sentence was denied later in August 2017; a court upheld his conviction and ten years’ imprisonment in a trial behind closed doors. On 5 December 2017, Wang was transferred to Ward 7; he was told that he would be with Taliban and other prisoners who have badly beaten him in the past. On 23 August 2018, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that Iran had no legal basis for Wang’s arrest and detention, and that he should be released immediately. Mary Beth Norton, president of the American Historical Association, wrote a letter to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei expressing “deep concern” about Wang’s 10-year prison sentence. Wang continued to be held at Evin Prison and reported difficult conditions, including receiving only occasional visits from a prison physician despite his deteriorating physical and mental health — including arthritis, rashes, pains, diarrhea, severe depression, and ill-treatment — and receiving violent threats against his life by a fellow inmate.

Sources:

Website about Xiyue Wang: <https://sites.google.com/view/freexiyuewang>; “[Academic Statement for the Release of Xiyue Wang](#)” (petition); personal communication Trudy Peterson (18 July 2017); personal communication Eleanor Hubbard (24–25 July 2017); Princeton University, “[Frequently Asked Questions about Xiyue Wang](#)” (20 July 2017; updated 28 July 2017); Rick Gladstone, “[Iran Sentences U.S. Graduate Student to 10 Years on Spying Charges](#),” *New York Times* (16 July 2017); Carly Baldwin, “[Iran Convicts Princeton Grad Student Of Spying](#),” *Princeton Patch* (16 July 2017); Mitch Gerber, “[Iran Sentences Princeton Ph.D. Student to 10 Years in Prison](#),” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (16 July 2017); Saeed Kamali Dehghan, “[Iran Sentences Chinese-born American to 10 years in Jail on Spying Charges](#),” *Guardian* (16 July 2017); AFP, “[Iran Sentences Chinese-American Princeton Historian Xiyue Wang to 10 years for Espionage](#),” *South China Morning Post* (17 July 2017); “[Iran Denies Graduate Student’s Appeal of 10-Year Sentence](#),” *Town Topics* (23 August 2017); “[Iran Court Upholds 10-year Jail Sentence of US ‘Spy’](#),” *BBC News* (3 September 2017); Hua Qu (Xiyue Wang’s wife), “Xiyue Wang Transferred to

More Extreme Prison” (5 December 2017); United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, [Opinion No. 52/2018 concerning Xiyue Wang \(Islamic Republic of Iran\)](#) (29 August 2018); Middle East Studies Association, [Letter to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei re Xiyue Wang](#) (5 September 2018); Princeton University, [“U.N. Committee Calls for Immediate Release of Princeton Graduate Student Imprisoned in Iran”](#) (10 September 2018); [“Statement from Wife of Xiyue Wang in Response to UN Committee Opinion Letter,”](#) *Facebook* (10 September 2018); Scholars at Risk, *Free to Think: Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project* (New York: SAR, 2018), 35; Jennifer Griffin & Lucas Tomlinson, [“Wife of US Scholar Imprisoned in Iran Speaks Out: ‘His Only Crime Is He’s American’,”](#) *Fox News* (15 January 2019); [“UN Experts Urge Iran to Release Imprisoned American Scholar Xiyue Wang”](#) (press release; 7 May 2019); [“Wife Pleads for Release of Princeton Student Incarcerated in Iran While Doing Research on Dissertation,”](#) *Committee of Concerned Scientists* (9 June 2019); Laura Dean, [“The Threat of War Brings New Fears to an American Hostage in Iran,”](#) *New Yorker* (24 June 2019); [“UN Experts Urge Iran to Release Imprisoned American Scholar Xiyue Wang”](#) (press release, 7 May 2019); Hua Qu, [“My Husband Is Unjustly Imprisoned in Iran: The International Community Must Help,”](#) *Washington Post* (24 May 2019); Scholars at Risk, [Case Information](#) (7 August 2019); [Template letter to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei](#) (7 August 2019).