

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	324
Land:	Kina
Kilde:	U.S. Department of State.
Titel:	2012 Report on International Religious Freedom – China.
Udgivet:	20. maj 2013
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	2. juli 2013

2012 Report on International Religious Freedom - China

Publisher [United States Department of State](#)

Publication Date 20 May 2013

Cite as United States Department of State, *2012 Report on International Religious Freedom - China*, 20 May 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/519dd4d88f.html> [accessed 29 May 2013]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

Executive Summary

Reports on Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet are appended at the end of this report.

The constitution states that Chinese citizens enjoy "freedom of religious belief" but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities." The government applies this term in a manner that does not meet international human rights standards for freedom of religion and routinely enforces other laws that restrict religious freedom. The constitution also proclaims the right of citizens to believe in or not believe in any religion. However, only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services. The government's respect for religious freedom declined during the year, particularly in Tibetan areas and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

The government emphasized state control over religion and restricted the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents when these were perceived, even potentially, to threaten state or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interests, including social stability. Local authorities often pressured unaffiliated religious believers to affiliate with patriotic associations and used a variety of means, including administrative detention, to punish members of unregistered religious or spiritual groups. In some parts of the country, however, local authorities tacitly approved of or did not interfere with the activities of unregistered groups. In February the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) and five other organs jointly published an opinion supporting religious organizations' involvement in disaster relief and social service activities, ostensibly opening new avenues for faith-based organizations to provide aid to the public.

There were reports of societal and employment discrimination based on religious affiliation, ethnicity, belief, or practice. Both Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists reported increased societal discrimination, especially around sensitive periods.

The Department of State, the embassy, and consulates general in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan have repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns and pressed for the expansion of religious freedom in China. U.S. officials consistently urged the government to adhere to internationally recognized rights of religious freedom, protested abuses of religious freedom, acknowledged positive trends, and met with members of religious communities, including those being persecuted for their beliefs. The embassy protested the imprisonment of individuals on charges related to their religious practices and other abuses of religious freedom. The Department of State also brought religious leaders and scholars to the United States to deepen

their understanding of the role of religion in American society. Since 1999 the secretary of state has designated the country as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In August 2011, the secretary of state redesignated the country as a CPC.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to Bureau of Statistics information as of November 1, 2010, the population of mainland China is 1,339,725,000. In its report to the United Nations Human Rights Council during its Universal Periodic Review in February 2009, the government stated that there were "more than 100 million followers of different religious faiths and the religious population is steadily increasing." However, accurate estimates of the numbers of religious believers vary widely depending on the source. For example, a 2007 survey conducted by East China Normal University states that 31.4 percent of citizens aged 16 and over, or 300 million people, are religious believers. The same survey estimates that there are 200 million Buddhists, Taoists, or worshippers of folk gods, although accurate estimates are difficult to make because many adherents practice exclusively at home.

According to the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), there are more than 21 million Muslims in the country; unofficial estimates range as high as 50 million. Hui Muslims are concentrated primarily in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces. Uighur Muslims live primarily in Xinjiang. According to Xinjiang Statistics Bureau data from 2010, there are approximately 10 million Uighurs in Xinjiang.

The 2011 Blue Book of Religions, produced by the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), a research institution directly under the State Council, reports the number of Protestant Christians to be between 23 and 40 million. A June 2010 SARA report estimates there are 16 million Protestants affiliated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). According to 2010 Pew Research Center estimates, there are 67 million Protestant Christians, of whom 23 million are affiliated with the TSPM.

According to SARA, more than six million Catholics worship in sites registered by the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). The Pew Center estimates that there are nine million Catholics on the mainland, 5.7 million of whom are affiliated with the CPA.

In addition to the five nationally recognized religions, local governments have legalized certain religious communities and practices, such as Orthodox Christianity in Xinjiang, Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, and Guangdong provinces. Some ethnic minorities retain traditional religions, such as Dongba among the Naxi people in Yunnan and Buluotuo among the Zhuang in Guangxi. Worship of the folk deity Mazu reportedly has been reclassified as "cultural heritage" rather than religious practice.

Prior to the government's 1999 ban on Falun Gong, a self-described spiritual discipline, it was estimated that there were 70 million adherents.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution states that Chinese citizens have "freedom of religious belief," but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities," a term applied in a manner that falls well short of international human rights standards for freedom of religion. The constitution does not define "normal."

The government has signed, but not ratified, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which provides all individuals the right to "adopt a religion or belief" of choice

and manifest belief through "worship, observance, and practice." The constitution provides for the right to hold or not hold a religious belief and states that state organs, public organizations, and individuals may not discriminate against citizens "who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion."

It is not possible to take legal action against the government on the basis of the religious freedom protections afforded by the constitution. Criminal law allows the state to sentence government officials to up to two years in prison if they violate religious freedom. There were no reported cases of such prosecutions during the year.

CCP members are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. Members who belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion. The vast majority of public office holders are CCP members.

Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services. Other religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official patriotic religious association or Catholics professing loyalty to the Vatican, are not permitted to register as legal entities. Proselytizing in public or unregistered places of worship is not permitted. Tibetan Buddhists in China are not free to venerate the Dalai Lama openly and encounter severe government interference in religious practice (see Tibet section). Religious groups independent of the five official government patriotic religious associations have difficulty obtaining legal status and are vulnerable to coercive and punitive action by SARA, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and other party or government security organs.

Certain religious or spiritual groups are banned by law. The criminal law defines banned groups as "evil cults" and those belonging to them can be sentenced to prison. A 1999 judicial explanation stated that this term refers to "those illegal groups that have been found using religions, qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline), or other things as a camouflage, deifying their leading members, recruiting and controlling their members, and deceiving people by molding and spreading superstitious ideas, and endangering society." There are no public criteria for determining, or procedures for challenging, such a designation. The government maintains a ban on the Guanyin Method Sect (Guanyin Famen or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), Zhong Gong (a qigong exercise discipline), and Falun Gong. The government also considers several Christian groups to be "evil cults," including the "Shouters," Eastern Lightning, the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church, Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (or San Ban Pu Ren), Association of Disciples, Lord God Sect, Established King Church, Unification Church, Family of Love, and the South China Church.

The CCP maintains its Leading Small Group for Preventing and Dealing with the Problem of Heretical Cults and its implementing "610" offices (named for the date of its creation on June 10, 1999) to eliminate the Falun Gong movement and address "evil cults."

The 1998 Religious Affairs Regulations and 2005 Regulations on Social Organizations allow official patriotic religious associations to engage in activities such as building places of worship, training religious leaders, publishing literature, and providing social services to local communities. The CCP's United Front Work Department, SARA, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs provide policy guidance and supervision on the implementation of these regulations. Most leaders of official government religious organizations serve in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a CCP-led body that provides advice to the central government from business leaders, academics, and other segments of society.

Since 2005 SARA has acknowledged, through a policy posted on its Web site, that family and friends have the right to meet at home for worship, including prayer and Bible study, without

registering with the government. However, authorities regularly harass and detain small groups that meet for religious purposes in homes and other locations.

On March 1, 2010, regulations issued by the State Administration of Foreign Exchange went into effect, outlining requirements under which all domestic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious organizations, may be permitted to receive donations in foreign currency. The regulation requires documented approval by SARA of donations from foreign sources to domestic religious groups of over one million RMB (\$152,997).

The government subsidizes the construction of state-sanctioned places of worship and religious schools.

Individuals seeking to enroll at an official seminary or other institution of religious learning must obtain the support of the official patriotic religious association. The government requires students to demonstrate "political reliability," and political issues are included in examinations of graduates of all religious schools. Both registered and unregistered religious groups report a shortage of trained clergy.

The government and the Holy See have not established diplomatic relations, and the Vatican has no representative in the country. The CPA does not recognize the authority of the Holy See to appoint bishops; approximately 40 Catholic bishops remain independent of the CPA and operate unofficially. The CPA has allowed the Vatican discreet input into selecting some bishops, and an estimated 90 percent of CPA bishops have reconciled with the Vatican. Nevertheless, in some locations local authorities reportedly pressure unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce all ordinations approved by the Holy See. Most of the Catholic bishops previously appointed by the government as CPA bishops later were elevated by the Vatican through apostolic mandates.

Faith-based charities, like all other charitable groups in the country, are required to register with the government. According to several unregistered religious groups, an additional prerequisite is obtaining official co-sponsorship of the registration application by the local official religious affairs bureau, rather than a technical or other bureau. These groups often also are required to affiliate with one of the five patriotic religious associations. The government does not permit unregistered charity groups of any sort to raise funds openly, hire employees, open bank accounts, or own property.

The government allows social service work by registered religious groups, including Catholic, Buddhist, and Protestant organizations.

In February the State Administration of Religious Affairs, the United Front Work Department, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and the Taxation Bureau jointly published an opinion supporting religious organizations' involvement in disaster relief and social service activities. The opinion also states that overseas donations received by religious organizations are tax deductible or qualify for tax exemptions if the funds are used for charitable activities.

Under Article 33 of the Regulations on Religious Affairs, if a religious structure is to be demolished or relocated because of city planning or construction of key projects, the party responsible for demolishing the structure should consult with the religious affairs bureau and the religious group using the structure. If all parties agree to the demolition, the party conducting the demolition should agree to rebuild the structure or provide compensation equal to the appraised market value of the structure. In some cases, officials do not hold developers accountable to these regulations or collude with them in their demolition plans.

Registered religious organizations are allowed to compile and print religious materials for internal use. To distribute religious materials publicly, an organization must follow national printing

regulations, which restrict the publication and distribution of literature with religious content. The government limits distribution of Bibles to TSPM/Chinese Christian Council entities such as churches, church bookshops, and seminaries. Individuals cannot order Bibles directly from publishing houses. Members of unregistered churches report that the supply and distribution of Bibles are inadequate, particularly in rural locations. There are approximately 600 Christian titles legally in circulation. According to a foreign Christian source, in the last 10 years, an estimated 200 Christian bookstores and nine domestic Christian publishers have opened in the country.

Under the Regulations on Religious Affairs and other regulations on publishing, religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles and Qurans, may be confiscated and unauthorized publishing houses closed. There were reports that XUAR regulations banned Uighur-language editions of the Bible.

In 2005 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that parents were permitted to instruct children under the age of 18 in religious beliefs and children may participate in religious activities. However, officials in the XUAR also stated in 2005 that minors must complete nine years of compulsory education before they can receive religious education. The Xinjiang Implementing Measures on the Law on the Protection of Minors imposes penalties on adults who "force" minors to participate in religious activities. The teaching of atheism in schools is allowed.

The law states that job applicants shall not face discrimination in hiring based on factors including religious belief.

Some religious adherents oppose the state's family planning policy for reasons of religious belief and practice. The country still maintains strict birth limitation policies. (See section 1.f. of the Country Report on Human Rights Practices for China.)

Foreign residents who belong to religious groups not officially recognized by the government are generally permitted to practice their religions. The constitution states that official government religious bodies are not "subject to any foreign domination." According to the Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens within the Territory of the People's Republic of China, foreigners may not proselytize, conduct religious activities at unregistered venues, or conduct religious activities with local citizens at temporary religious venues. A 2011 Central Committee of the Communist Party directive to universities provides guidance on how to prevent proselytizing among university students by foreigners.

The government allows some foreign educational institutions to continue to provide religious materials in Chinese, which are used by both registered and unregistered religious groups.

According to the law, criminals have the right to believe in a religion and maintain their original religious beliefs while in custody. In practice, some prisoners and detainees of faith were told to recant their beliefs.

In October the government passed legislation banning institutions from performing involuntary mental health examinations and inpatient treatment except in cases in which patients express an intent to harm themselves or others. Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law, passed in March, include a provision for appealing compulsory medical treatment decisions. Some critics maintain that the law still does not provide meaningful legal protections for Falun Gong practitioners, underground religious adherents, and others sent to psychiatric facilities for political reasons.

The government does not observe any religious holidays as national holidays.

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including religious prisoners and detainees. The government's respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom fell well short of internationally recognized standards.

During the year religious affairs officials and security organs scrutinized and restricted the religious activities of registered and unregistered religious and spiritual groups. The government harassed, detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison a number of religious adherents for activities reported to be related to their religious beliefs and practice. These activities included assembling for religious worship, expressing religious beliefs in public and in private, and publishing religious texts.

In parts of the country, local authorities tacitly approved of or did not interfere with the activities of unregistered groups. Guangdong officials, for example, increasingly allowed unregistered places of worship to hold services provided that they remained small in scale and did not disrupt social stability. In other areas, local officials punished the same activities by restricting activities and meetings, confiscating and destroying property, physically assaulting and injuring participants, or imprisoning leaders and worshippers. In some parts of the country, authorities charged religious believers not affiliated with a patriotic religious association with various crimes, including "illegal religious activities" or "disrupting social stability." Local authorities often pressured unaffiliated religious believers to affiliate with patriotic associations and used administrative detention, including confinement and abuse at Reeducation Through Labor (RTL) camps, to punish members of unregistered religious or spiritual groups.

Over the course of the year, the government's repression of religious freedom remained severe in the XUAR and other Tibetan areas, particularly during "sensitive periods."

Official tolerance for groups associated with Buddhism, except for Tibetan Buddhism, and Taoism, was greater than that for groups associated with other religions. The government continued to restrict the growth of unregistered Protestant church networks and cross-congregational affiliations.

According to *Legal Daily*, the MPS directly administered 24 high-security psychiatric hospitals for the criminally insane (also known as *ankang* facilities). Unregistered religious believers and Falun Gong adherents were among those reported to be held solely for political or religious reasons in these institutions, along with mentally ill patients. Regulations for committing a person to an *ankang* facility were not clear, and detainees or their families were afforded few formal mechanisms for effectively challenging public security officials' determinations of mental illness or the administrative sentencing of individuals to *ankang* facilities. Some patients in these hospitals reportedly were given medicine against their will and sometimes forcibly subjected to electric shock treatment.

It remained difficult to confirm some aspects of reported abuses of Falun Gong adherents. International Falun Gong-affiliated nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international media reported that detentions of Falun Gong practitioners continued to increase around sensitive dates. Authorities reportedly instructed some neighborhood communities to report Falun Gong members to officials and offered monetary rewards to citizens who informed on Falun Gong practitioners. Falun Gong-affiliated NGOs alleged that detained practitioners were subjected to various methods of physical and psychological coercion in attempts to force them to deny their belief in Falun Gong. Falun Gong sources estimated that since 1999, at least 6,000 Falun Gong practitioners had been sentenced to prison. Falun Gong adherents also have been subjected to administrative sentences of up to three years in RTL camps. Reports from overseas Falun Gong-affiliated advocacy groups estimated that thousands of adherents in the country had been sentenced to RTL. The media reported allegations of Falun Gong practitioners held without trial at the Masanjia Labor Camp in Liaoning Province.

Individuals belonging to or supporting other banned groups were imprisoned or administratively sentenced to RTL on charges such as "distributing evil cult materials" or "using a heretical organization to subvert the law."

In June 11-year-old Uighur Muslim Mirzahid Amanullah Shahyari died while in the custody of Korla police following a raid on an unregistered religious school in Nurbagh Township, Shayar County, in Aksu Prefecture. Authorities forced his mother to bury his body, which showed signs of torture, without the remains undergoing Islamic burial rites.

Wang Yonghang, a lawyer who openly advocated for religious freedom and defended Falun Gong practitioners, was subjected to torture in prison, where he has been serving a seven-year sentence since 2009 for "using a cult to undermine implementation of the law." As of June, he was reportedly suffering from multiple ailments, including tuberculosis, internal fluid buildup, and paralysis below the waist.

In April 2011 authorities forced two unregistered churches in Guangzhou to close and detained their leaders after they unsuccessfully tried to hold Easter services, according to foreign media. However, authorities indicated that members of the congregations could continue to meet in smaller groups of no more than 10. The detained leaders have since been released but officials continue to impose these restrictions.

In April police in Ye County, Henan Province, detained seven house church Christians and later accused them of being members of the banned group, "the Shouters," a charge they denied. In October the Ye County Procuratorate indicted them on charges of "using a cult meeting to interfere with law enforcement."

In May authorities in Shunle County, Kashgar Prefecture, sentenced Uighur Muslim Sidik Kurban to 15 years in jail and five years' deprivation of political rights for overseeing illegal home-based religious schools throughout the region. In June authorities in Hotan Prefecture sentenced Uighur Muslim Hebibullah Ibrahim to 10 years for selling "illegal religious materials."

In June police raided an unsanctioned Islamic religious school in Hotan. Twelve children, two school staff, and three policemen reportedly were injured in the raid. Police reportedly arrested 47 people in a subsequent crackdown following the raid on accusations of owning illegal publications and disturbing social stability.

Ablikim Abduyeyim, son of Uighur Muslim activist Rebiya Kadeer, remained in prison at year's end. Alim Abdureyim, another son of Rebiya Kadeer, was released in December, but his movements are reportedly restricted and he is not allowed to leave Urumqi.

In July officials consecrated Joseph Yue Fusheng as a bishop in Harbin without Vatican approval. Government officials ordered seven priests in Heilongjiang Province who disagreed with the ordination to leave their parishes. Separately in Shanghai, authorities consecrated Thaddeus Ma Daqin as an auxiliary bishop with Vatican and CPA approval. Following the consecration, Ma announced that he was resigning from the CPA to focus on his religious duties. Officials detained him following the service and reportedly held him at Sheshan Catholic Seminary. His subsequent whereabouts remained unclear at year's end, but various sources said he remained under detention by government security officials. All autumn classes at the seminary were cancelled. Catholic news sources reported that in December, the Chinese Catholic Bishops Association revoked his position as bishop, leaving 95-year-old Shanghai Bishop Alyosius Jin, the leader of one of China's most important dioceses, without an approved successor. Some unofficial Catholic clergy remained in detention, in particular in Hebei Province. Harassment of unregistered bishops and priests continued, including government surveillance and repeated short detentions.

In July 2011 Guangzhou's Haizhu District People's Court sentenced lawyer Zhu Yubiao to two years' imprisonment for possessing Falun Gong books and DVDs, according to online reporting.

Zhu, who previously handled Falun Gong cases, had been held in police custody since August 2010 on charges of "using a cult to undermine the law." Although Zhu was scheduled to be released in August, authorities transferred him to Sanshui Law School, where Falun Gong practitioners reportedly attend mandatory study sessions.

In September authorities in Inner Mongolia sentenced Sun Yuefen and Ren Zhimin to two years in an RTL camp after they offered free medical services and evangelized to patients. Other Christian participants in the activities also faced detention.

In October authorities detained Falun Gong practitioner Chen Linfen in Fujian's Zhangzhou No. 1 Detention Center after three police and one staff member of the local Residence Committee ransacked her house and confiscated Falun Gong books, according to online accounts.

In November Beijing police arrested Zhang Fengying during a grocery shopping trip after she spoke to local residents about the benefits of practicing Falun Gong, according to her daughter. Zhang was later charged with "using an evil cult" to undermine law enforcement.

There was no new information about the November 2011 arrest of Falun Gong practitioner Tan Kaiqing or the August 2011 arrests of Liu Shaozai and Mai Weilian, also Falun Gong practitioners.

In December police in at least nine provinces arrested approximately 1000 adherents of the Church of the Almighty God, also known as Eastern Lightning, for aggressively proselytizing and manipulating fear of an apocalypse on December 21 to further their aims. The government, which has labeled the millenarian sect an "evil cult," launched a media campaign against its members for rumor mongering and swindling people.

On December 8, overseas media reported that police seized Christian missionary Cao Nan and 10 others while Cao was preaching in Shenzhen's Lizhi Park during new Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping's visit to the city. One week later, police seized and then detained Cao for 13 days after he returned to the park to preach.

At year's end, Alimujiang Yimiti, the Uighur leader of an unregistered Christian church, continued to serve a 15-year sentence for "illegally providing state secrets or intelligence to foreign entities." In August a Beijing-based attorney attempted to meet with him, but was ultimately denied access. He was sentenced in December 2009 by the Kashgar Prefecture Intermediate People's Court; his appeal was denied in March 2010.

At year's end, Buddhist Zen Master Wu Zeheng continued to face harassment, close monitoring, and restrictions on his movement by authorities in Guangdong Province's Zhuhai City, according to overseas media and religious groups.

In December Shanghai security officials raided an unofficial Protestant church and detained a South Korean pastor, threatening him with deportation.

Security officials frequently interrupted outdoor services of the unregistered Shouwang church in Beijing and temporarily detained members attending those services. Authorities restricted the freedom of movement of Shouwang's head pastor and his family and several other leaders during the year. The church continued to be unable to access a property it purchased for the purpose of holding religious services; at various times the church's Web site was blocked.

The government did not renew the professional licenses of a number of attorneys who advocated on behalf of religious freedom, and it imprisoned other religious freedom activists or otherwise impeded their work on behalf of religious clients. Authorities also harassed or detained the family members of some religious leaders and religious freedom activists.

Officials continued to hold anti-cult education sessions and propaganda campaigns.

In Wugang City, Hunan Province, local government officials held over 30 events related to "evil cults" and disseminated publications during Chinese New Year, warning against Falun Gong and house churches. Officials required families to sign statements guaranteeing that they would not take part in the "evil cult" activities involving Falun Gong and house churches as a prerequisite for registering their children for school.

The government reportedly sought the forcible return of ethnic Uighurs living outside the country and continued to prosecute those who had been forcibly returned. Media reports indicate that in January, China sentenced two Uighurs who had been forcibly returned from Cambodia in December 2009 to life in prison.

Some individuals and groups affiliated with religious communities claimed that the government took their land without adequate compensation in accordance with the Religious Affairs Regulations. In February local officials authorized the demolition of the Xin'an Three-Self Church in Huaibei city, Anhui Province. Officials later attempted to coerce church leaders into signing settlement documents agreeing to the demolition.

Pressure from authorities on large unregistered churches in Guangdong Province continued. In March Guangzhou police cut off electricity and the water supply to the 1,000-member Guangfu House Church on the grounds that the recently purchased Baiyun District facility was used for illegal gatherings, according to overseas media. Police also summoned Guangfu's pastor for questioning. The congregation was subsequently forced to meet in hotels that sometimes canceled the reserved space because of police pressure.

In June Ministry of State Security officials shut down a training program in Guangdong's Foshan Municipality that was run by the Chinese Theological Society, a group of Hong Kong theological educators, according to online accounts.

In Guangdong's Dongguan Municipality, police and religious authorities shut down house churches in the city's Huangjiang, Tangxia, and Gaobu townships in August, according to overseas media, prompting house church ministers to submit an application for administrative review requesting that municipal government officials repeal the local Religious Affairs Bureau decision.

In the XUAR, the government's concerns over "separatism, religious extremism, and terrorism" contributed to repressive restrictions on religious practices of Uighur Muslims. Authorities often failed to distinguish between peaceful religious practice and criminal or terrorist activities. It remained difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those seeking political goals, the right to worship, or criminal acts. Uighur sources reported increased pressure in official campaigns to dissuade women from wearing religious clothing and men from wearing beards. Uighur sources also reported that recipients of public welfare stipends were asked to sign a pledge not to cover their faces for religious reasons. Hui Muslims in Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan provinces engaged in religious practice with less government interference than did Uighurs.

Media reported that Muslims could apply online or through local official Islamic associations to participate in the Hajj. According to media reports in the country, approximately 13,800 Muslim citizens participated in the Hajj in the fall, flown on 41 specially arranged Hajj charter flights, although this number included Islamic association and security officials sent to monitor Muslim citizens and prevent unauthorized pilgrimages. Uighur Muslims separately reported difficulties taking part in state-sanctioned Hajj travel due to the inability to obtain travel documents in a timely manner, difficulties in meeting criteria required for participation in the official Hajj program run by the Islamic Association of China, and quotas on the number of travelers from the

country imposed by Saudi Arabia. The government took measures to limit the ability of Uighur Muslims to make private Hajj pilgrimages outside of the government-organized program.

In February Chinese authorities launched a week-long campaign to prevent illegal religious activities through the use of "patriotic education."

In July and August authorities in the XUAR imposed stricter controls on religious practices during Ramadan. The government barred teachers, professors, civil servants, and Communist Party members from fasting and attending religious services at mosques. Local authorities reportedly fined people for studying the Quran in unauthorized sessions, detained people for "illegal" religious activities or carrying "illegal" religious materials, and stationed security personnel in and around mosques to restrict attendance to local residents. According to Uighur social media sites, in December authorities in Yengisher County forced all of the Uighur teachers at the August First Middle School to sign letters pledging not to believe in religion or participate in religious activities.

Despite widespread reports of prohibitions on children participating in religious activities in various localities throughout the XUAR, observers reported seeing children in mosques and at Friday prayers in some areas of the region.

Islamic schools in Yunnan Province were reluctant to accept ethnic Uighur students out of concerns that they would bring unwanted attention from government authorities and negatively impact school operations.

Tight restrictions on the exchanges of monks among Tibetan Buddhist monasteries affected the quality of Tibetan religious education. Ethnic Han who wished to study Tibetan Buddhism in Tibetan areas often were denied permission for long-term study there.

Several religious groups reported that authorities rejected their applications for registration because the groups had not affiliated with an official patriotic religious association. Respect for SARA's policy permitting family and friends to meet at home for worship, including prayer and Bible study, without registering with the government was uneven at the provincial, county, and local levels. In various areas throughout the country, local officials disrupted religious meetings in private homes, detained participants, and confiscated materials and equipment.

The government rejected repeated applications to register the Bimo shamanistic religion, practiced by many of the eight million ethnic Yi living in southwest China. This limited the Yi people's ability to preserve their religious heritage.

Officials employed a combination of persuasion, coercion, and physical abuse to pressure unofficial churches to affiliate with the TSPM.

Authorities often confiscated Bibles in raids on house churches. Customs officials continued to monitor the importation of Bibles and other religious materials. In the XUAR, government authorities at times restricted the sale of the Quran.

Patriotic religious association-approved Catholic and Protestant seminarians, Muslim clerics, and some Buddhist monks were allowed to travel abroad for additional religious study. However, religious workers not affiliated with a patriotic religious association faced difficulties in obtaining passports or official approval to study abroad.

Authorities periodically blocked the blogs of a number of religious groups and individuals during the year.

In some instances foreign groups had to apply for special access to religious facilities.

The Falun Gong also reported several incidents of the government's interference with its activities abroad. According to NGO reports, the Shen Yun Performing Arts Company, and several media outlets, government officials pressured venues and governments in a number of countries to limit the broadcast time of Falun Gong-associated radio stations and cancel or otherwise delay Shen Yun music and dance performances.

Registered religious groups provided social services throughout the country, and authorities allowed certain overseas faith-based aid groups to deliver services in coordination with local authorities and domestic groups. Some unregistered religious groups reported that local authorities placed limits on their ability to provide social services.

Although authorities required CCP members to be atheists and generally discouraged them from participating in religious activities, their attendance at official church services in Guangdong Province was reportedly growing, as authorities increasingly chose to turn a blind eye to their attendance.

For information on North Korean refugees in China, please see the U.S. Department of State's *2012 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in China* and the *2012 International Religious Freedom Report on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Because religion, culture, and ethnicity are often tightly intertwined, it is difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as examples of ethnic or religious intolerance. Religious and ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims, experienced discrimination throughout the country because of both their religious beliefs and their status as ethnic minorities with distinct languages and cultures. In the XUAR, tension between Han Chinese and Uighur Muslims continued during the year. Tensions also continued among ethnic and religious groups in Tibetan areas, including Han, Hui, Tibetan Buddhists, and Tibetan Muslims.

Despite the labor law's provisions against discrimination in hiring based on religious belief, some religious believers reported that they believed their employers openly discriminated against them. Some Protestant Christians claimed they were terminated by their employers due to their religious activities. Muslims in the XUAR reported that they lost their positions and were detained by authorities for praying in their workplaces.

In November, in Zhenping County, Henan Province, a Han Chinese man reportedly lifted the veil of a Uighur Muslim girl, resulting in clashes between 1,000 Uighurs and local riot police. Police subsequently detained several of the rioters.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Department of State, the embassy in Beijing, and the consulates general in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan regularly urged government officials at the central and local levels to implement stronger protections for religious freedom. The U.S. ambassador met with members of religious groups and religious freedom defenders and highlighted religious freedom in public speeches and private diplomacy with senior officials. At the same time, government pressure led some religious leaders to decline requests for meetings with U.S. government officials. The Department of State, the embassy, and the consulates general regularly called upon the government to release prisoners of conscience, including religious prisoners. The U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue, held in July, included a discussion of religious freedom.

U.S. officials, both in the country and in the United States, met regularly with academics, NGOs, members of both registered and unregistered religious groups, and family members of religious prisoners. The ambassador hosted events for religious leaders and practitioners, including an iftar

that had among its guests prominent imams from the country. The Department of State nominated a number of religious leaders and scholars to participate in exchange programs related to the role of religion in American society. The Department of State also introduced government officials to members of American religious communities and officials from U.S. government agencies who engaged with those communities.

Since 1999 the secretary of state has designated the country as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the IRFA for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In August 2011, the secretary redesignated the country as a CPC and extended existing economic measures in effect against the country under the IRFA related to restrictions on exports of crime control and detection instruments and equipment (Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, P.L. 101-246).