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2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: China (Includes Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Macau) - China

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Executive Summary

The constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which cites the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), states that citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief" but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities," without defining "normal." The government recognizes five official religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" representing these religions are permitted to register with the government and officially permitted to hold worship services, although other groups reported meeting unofficially. CCP members and members of the armed forces are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. National law prohibits organizations or individuals from interfering with the state educational system for minors younger than the age of 18, effectively barring them from participating in most religious activities or receiving religious education. Some provinces have additional laws precluding minors' participation in religious activities. The government continued to assert control over religion and to restrict the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents that it perceived as threatening state or CCP interests, according to religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international media reports. NGOs and media continued to report deaths in custody and that the government tortured, physically abused, arrested, disappeared, detained, sentenced to prison, subjected to forced labor and forced indoctrination in CCP ideology, and harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices. The NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers estimated the government imprisoned 2,987 individuals for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief as of December 7. According to *Minghui*, a Falun Gong-affiliated publication, 101 Falun Gong practitioners died during the year as a result of persecution of their faith, compared with 107 in 2020, and both *Minghui* and the Falun Dafa Infocenter reported police arrested more than 5,000 practitioners and harassed more than 9,000 others. According to the annual report of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), authorities arrested more than 11,156 of its members and subjected them to physical abuse, including beatings, sleep deprivation, and being forced into stress positions, resulting in the death of at least nine individuals. There were reports the government pressured individuals to renounce their religious beliefs. The government continued its multiyear campaign of "Sinicization" to bring all religious doctrine and practice in line with CCP doctrine, which included requiring clergy of all faiths to attend political indoctrination sessions and suggesting content for sermons that emphasized loyalty to the CCP and the state. The State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) issued regulations, effective May 1, entitled "Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy," requires all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and created a database of "religious personnel" to track their performance. Authorities did not issue a "clergy card" to individuals not belonging to one of the five officially recognized patriotic religious associations, including pastors of Protestant house churches, Catholic clergy who rejected the government's 2018 provisional agreement with the Holy See and refused to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), teachers and clergy at independent mosques and Buddhist and Taoist temples, rabbis, and religious personnel of new religious movements. The SARA issued new regulations on September 1 that require all religious schools to teach Xi Jinping Thought and adhere to the "Sinicization of religion." The government prohibited private tutors, including those based abroad, from using textbooks "propagating religious teachings" and closed several informal, religiously affiliated schools.

During the year, officials across the country shut down religious venues, including some that were affiliated with the authorized patriotic religious associations, in some but not all cases citing COVID-19 restrictions. The government intensified its campaign against religious groups it characterized as

“cults,” including the CAG, maintained a ban on other groups, such as Falun Gong, and conducted propaganda campaigns against *xie jiao* (literally “heterodox teachings”) aimed at school-age children. Authorities limited online worship. Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible, the Quran, and other religious literature, and penalized businesses that copied and published religious materials. The government removed religious apps from app stores and censored religious content from the popular messaging service WeChat. Authorities censored online posts referencing Jesus or the Bible and there were continued reports that authorities destroyed public displays of religious symbols throughout the country. The government continued to remove architectural features that identified some churches and mosques as religious sites and removed crosses from private property. The SARA’s “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy” made no provision for the Holy See to have a role in the selection of Catholic bishops, despite the 2018 provisional agreement between the Vatican and the government concerning the appointment of bishops. At a national conference on religious affairs in December, President and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping called on religious personnel and government officials to “uphold and develop a religious theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners reported severe societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities. International media reported growing anti-Muslim sentiment in society as a result of the government’s Sinicization campaign.

The Charge d’Affaires and other U.S. embassy and consulate general officials met with a range of government officials to advocate for greater religious freedom and tolerance, and for the release of individuals imprisoned for religious reasons. The Charge and other embassy and consulate general officials met with members of registered and unregistered religious groups, family members of religious prisoners, NGOs, and others to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom. The embassy continued to amplify Department of State religious freedom initiatives and advocacy directly to Chinese citizens through outreach programs and social media. The U.S. Secretary of State, Charge, and other State Department and embassy officials issued public statements, including via social media, supporting religious freedom and condemning the PRC’s violations of the rights of religious minorities. The U.S. Secretary of State, Deputy Secretary of State, Charge d’Affaires, and other senior State Department officials and embassy and consulate general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom in China, Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang. On January 19, the then Secretary of State determined that since at least March 2017, the PRC has committed genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. On January 13, U.S. Customs and Border Protection issued a Withhold Release Order that prohibited the import of all cotton and tomato products produced in Xinjiang. On March 22, the U.S. Department of Treasury sanctioned two officials under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. On May 12, the Secretary of State announced visa restrictions against a PRC government official for his involvement in gross violations of human rights against Falun Gong practitioners. On June 24, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Department of Commerce, and U.S. Department of Labor took action against companies in the polysilicon industry using forced labor of religious and ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. On July 9, the U.S. Commerce Department added to the Entities List 14 Chinese electronics and technology firms and other businesses for helping enable “Beijing’s campaign of repression, mass detention, and high-technology surveillance” against Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. On July 13, the U.S. Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce, Homeland Security, and Labor, and the U.S. Trade Representative issued an updated Xinjiang Supply Chain Business Advisory that highlighted for businesses with potential supply chain and investment links to Xinjiang the risk of complicity with forced labor and human rights abuses. On December 6, the Presidential press secretary announced the United States would not send diplomatic or official representation to the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic or Paralympic Games because of human rights abuses in China. On December 10, the U.S. Department of State imposed visa restrictions on four current and former PRC officials for complicity with human rights violations in Xinjiang, and the U.S. Department of Treasury also sanctioned two officials and one company. On December 23, the President signed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On November 15, 2021, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.4 billion (midyear 2021). According to the State Council Information Office (SCIO) report *Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China*, published in September 2019, there are more than 200 million religious adherents in the country. An SCIO April 2018 white paper on religion in the country states there are approximately 5,500 religious groups.

Local and regional figures for the number of religious followers, including those belonging to the five officially recognized religions, are unclear. Local governments do not release these statistics, and even official religious organizations do not have accurate numbers. The Pew Research Center and other observers say the numbers of adherents of many religious groups often are underreported. The U.S. government estimates that Buddhists comprise 18.2 percent of the country's total population, Christians 5.1 percent, Muslims 1.8 percent, followers of folk religions 21.9 percent, and atheists or unaffiliated persons 52.2 percent, with Hindus, Jews, and Taoists comprising less than 1 percent. According to a February 2017 estimate by the U.S.-based NGO Freedom House, there are more than 350 million religious adherents in the country, including 185 to 250 million Buddhists, 60 to 80 million Protestants, 21 to 23 million Muslims, seven to 20 million Falun Gong practitioners, 12 million Roman Catholics, six to eight million Tibetan Buddhists, and hundreds of millions who follow various folk traditions. According to Boston University's 2020 World Religion Database, there are 499 million folk and ethnic religionists (34 percent), 474 million agnostics (33 percent), 228 million Buddhists (16 percent), 106 million Christians (7.4 percent), 100 million atheists (7 percent), 23.7 million Muslims (1.7 percent), and other religions adherents who together constitute less than 1 percent of the population, including 5.9 million Taoists, 1.8 million Confucians, 20,500 Sikhs, and 2,900 Jews. According to the Christian advocacy NGO Open Doors USA's *World Watch List 2022* report, there are 96.7 million Christians. According to 2015 data from the World Jewish Congress, the country's Jewish population is 2,500, concentrated in Beijing, Shanghai, and Kaifeng.

The SCIO's April 2018 white paper found the number of Protestants to be 38 million. Among these, there are 20 million Protestants affiliated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the state-sanctioned umbrella organization for all officially recognized Protestant churches, according to information on TSPM's website in March 2017. The SCIO report states there are six million Catholics, although media and international NGO estimates suggest there are 10-12 million, approximately half of whom practice in churches not affiliated with the CCPA. Accurate estimates on the numbers of Catholics and Protestants, as well as other faiths, are difficult to calculate because many adherents practice exclusively at home or in churches that are not state sanctioned.

According to the 2018 SCIO white paper, there are 10 ethnic minority groups totaling more than 20 million persons for whom Islam is the majority religion. Other sources indicate almost all Muslims are Sunni. The two largest Muslim ethnic minorities are Hui and Uyghur, with Hui Muslims concentrated primarily in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and in Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces. The SARA, also referred to as the National Religious Affairs Administration, estimates the Muslim Hui population at 10.6 million. A June report on the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) issued by the Department of Population and Employment Statistics of the PRC's National Bureau of Statistics estimates the total population in Xinjiang is 26 million. The report states Uyghurs, along with ethnic Kazakh, Hui, Kyrgyz, and members of other predominantly Muslim ethnic minority groups, number approximately 15 million residents, or 58 percent of the total population there.

While there is no reliable government breakdown of the Buddhist population by school, the vast majority of Buddhists are adherents of Mahayana Buddhism, according to the Pew Research Center. Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practices Bon, a pre-Buddhist indigenous religion.

Prior to the government's 1999 ban on Falun Gong, the government estimated there were 70 million adherents. Falun Gong sources estimate tens of millions continue to practice privately, and Freedom House estimates there are seven to 20 million practitioners.

Some ethnic minorities follow traditional religions, such as Dongba among the Naxi people in Yunnan Province and Buluotuo among the Zhuang in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The central government classifies worship of Mazu, a folk deity with Taoist roots, as an expression of "cultural heritage" rather than a religious practice.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution, which cites the leadership of the CCP and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping Thought, states citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief," but it limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities," without defining normal. It states

religion may not be used to disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system. The constitution provides for the right to hold or not to hold a religious belief. It says state organs, public organizations, and individuals may not discriminate against citizens “who believe in or do not believe in any religion.” The constitution states, “Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.”

The law does not allow individuals or groups to take legal action against the government based on 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 a citizen’s religious freedom.

The government recognizes five official religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Regulations require religious organizations to register with the government. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations are permitted to register, and only these organizations may legally hold worship services. The five associations, which operate under the direction of the CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD), are the Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, the TSPM, and the CCPA. Other religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official TSPM or Catholics professing loyalty to the Holy See but not affiliated with the CCPA, are not permitted to register as legal entities. The law does not provide a mechanism for religious groups independent of the five official patriotic religious associations to obtain legal status.

The CCP is responsible for creating religious regulations and oversees the UFWD, which in turn manages the SARA’s functions and responsibilities. The SARA is responsible for implementing the CCP’s religious regulations and administers the provincial and local bureaus of religious affairs.

On January 18, the SARA issued new regulations, effective May 1, entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy.” The regulations require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and to create a database of “religious personnel” to track their performance. Article 3 of the regulations states religious clergy “should love the motherland, support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, support the socialist system, abide by the constitution, laws, regulations, and rules, practice the core values of socialism, adhere to the principle of independent and self-administered religion in China, adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of religion in China, and operate to maintain national unity, religious harmony, and social stability.” Article 6 states, in part, clergy should “resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion.” The regulations also provide that “entrance to religious places of worship should be regulated through strict gatekeeping, verification of identity, and registration.” The regulations also stipulate that authorities will hold religious organizations and institutions responsible for the behavior of individual religious clergy. Article 7 stipulates religious staff should “focus on improving their own quality, improving their cultural and moral literacy, studying the contents of doctrines and regulations that are conducive to social harmony, progress of the times, and health and civilization, and integrate them into preaching, and play a role in promoting the Sinicization of religion in our country.”

The Counterterrorism Law describes “religious extremism” as the ideological basis of terrorism and states religious extremism uses “distorted religious teachings or other means to incite hatred or discrimination, or advocate violence.”

Authorities require CCP members and members of the armed forces to be atheists and forbid them from engaging in religious practices. Members found to belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion, although these rules are not universally enforced. The vast majority of public office holders are CCP members, and membership is widely considered a prerequisite for success in a government career. These restrictions on religious belief and practice also apply to retired CCP members.

The law bans certain religious or spiritual groups. Criminal law defines banned groups as “cult [xie jiao, literally ‘heterodox teachings’] organizations” and provides for criminal prosecution of individuals belonging to such groups and punishment of up to life in prison. There are no published criteria for determining, or procedures for challenging, such a designation. A national security law also explicitly bans cult organizations.

The CCP maintains an extralegal, party-run security apparatus to eliminate the Falun Gong movement and other organizations. The government considers Falun Gong an “illegal organization.” The government continues to ban the Guanyin Method religious group (Guanyin Famen or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy) and Zhong Gong (a *qigong* exercise discipline). The government also characterizes a number of Christian groups as “cult organizations,” including the Shouters, CAG (also known as Eastern Lightning), Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church (Quan Fanwei Jiaohui), Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (San Ban Puren), Association of Disciples, Established King Church, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), Family of Love, and South China Church.

According to regulations, in order to register, religious organizations must submit information about the organization's historical background, members, doctrines, key publications, minimum funding requirements, and government sponsor, which must be one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations. Registration information is required only once, but religious organizations must reregister if changes are made to the required documentation.

Under revisions to the civil code passed by the National People's Congress in 2020, a religious institution established according to law may apply for the status of a "legal person" (nonprofit entity) under Article 92 of the civil code. The revisions formalize the ability of organizations to possess property, publish approved materials, train staff, and collect donations, thereby facilitating authorities' ability to track and regulate religious institutions.

Religious and other regulations permit 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 UFWD, including the SARA, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs provide policy guidance and supervision on the implementation of these regulations.

Revisions to the Regulations on Religious Affairs in 2018 increased restrictions on unregistered religious groups. Individuals who participate in unsanctioned religious activities are subject to criminal and administrative penalties. The regulations stipulate that any form of income from illegal activities or illegal properties shall be confiscated and a fine imposed of between one to three times the value of the illegal income or properties. If the illegal income or properties cannot be identified, officials impose a fine of less than 50,000 renminbi (RMB) (\$7,800). Authorities may penalize property owners renting space to unregistered religious groups by confiscating properties and illegal incomes and levying fines between RMB 20,000 and 200,000 (\$3,100-\$31,400).

Government policy allows religious groups to engage in charitable work, but regulations specifically prohibit faith-based organizations from proselytizing while conducting charitable activities. Authorities require faith-based charities, like all other charitable groups, to register with the government. Once they are registered as official charities, authorities allow them to raise funds publicly and to receive tax benefits. The government does not permit unregistered charitable groups to raise funds openly, hire employees, open bank accounts, or own property. According to several unregistered religious groups, the government requires faith-based charities to obtain official cosponsorship of their registration application by the local official religious affairs bureau. Authorities often require these groups to affiliate with one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations.

The Regulations on Religious Affairs require members of religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad for "religious training, conferences, pilgrimages, and other activities." Anyone found organizing such activities without approval may be fined between RMB 20,000 and 200,000 (\$3,100-\$31,400). Illegally obtained income connected to such travel may be seized and, "if the case constitutes a crime, criminal responsibility shall be investigated according to law."

The regulations specify that no religious structure, including clerical housing, may be transferred, mortgaged, or utilized as an investment. SARA regulations place restrictions on religious groups conducting business or making investments by stipulating the property and income of religious groups, schools, and venues must not be distributed and should be used for activities and charities befitting their purposes; any individual or organization that donates funds to build religious venues is prohibited from owning the venues.

The regulations impose a limit on foreign donations to religious groups, stating such donations must be used for activities that authorities deem appropriate for the group and the site. Regulations state that any donations exceeding RMB 100,000 (\$15,700) must be submitted to the local government for review and approval. Religious groups, religious schools, and "religious activity sites" may not accept donations from foreign sources that have conditions attached.

The regulations require that religious activity "must not harm national security" or support "religious extremism." The regulations do not define "extremism." Measures to safeguard national unity and respond to "religious extremism" include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions. Penalties for "harm to national security" may include suspending groups and canceling the credentials of clergy.

National laws allow each provincial administration to issue its own regulations concerning religious affairs, including penalties for violations. Many provinces updated their regulations after the national 2018 regulations came into effect. In addition to the five officially recognized religions, local governments, at their discretion, may permit followers of certain unregistered religions to carry out religious practices.

By law, prison inmates have the right to believe in a religion and maintain their religious faith while in custody, but not a right to exercise their faith, such as by accessing prayer facilities or meeting with clergy. Muslim prisoners are reportedly allowed to have meals with the “halal” label.

The law does not define what constitutes proselytizing. The constitution states that no state unit, social organization, or individual may force a citizen to believe or not believe in a religion. Offenders are subject to administrative and criminal penalties.

An amendment to the criminal law and a judicial interpretation by the national Supreme People’s Procuratorate and the Supreme People’s Court published in 2016 criminalize the act of forcing others to wear “extremist” garments or symbols; doing so is punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment, short-term detention, or controlled release, as well as a concurrent fine. Neither the amendment nor the judicial interpretation defines what garments or symbols the law considers “extremist.”

Publication and distribution of literature containing religious content must follow guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration. Publication of religious material must also conform to guidelines determined by the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee. Online activities (“online religious information services”) of religious groups require prior approval from the provincial religious affairs bureau. Religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles, Qurans, and Buddhist and Taoist texts, may be confiscated, and unauthorized publishing houses closed.

In December, the government published new regulations to limit online religious content. The Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services, set to go into effect on March 1, 2022, would prohibit overseas organizations and individuals from operating online religious information services in the country.

The government offers some subsidies for the construction of state-sanctioned places of worship and religious schools.

To establish places of worship, religious organizations must first receive approval from the religious affairs department of the local government when the facility is proposed, and again before services are first held at that location. Religious organizations must submit dozens of documents to register during these approval processes, including detailed management plans of their religious activities, exhaustive financial records, and personal information on all staff members. Religious communities not going through the formal registration process may not legally have a set facility or worship meeting space. Therefore, every time such groups want to reserve a space for worship, such as by renting a hotel room or an apartment, they must seek a separate approval from government authorities for that specific service. Worshipping in a space without prior approval, gained either through the formal registration process or by seeking an approval for each service, is considered an illegal religious activity and is subject to criminal or administrative penalties.

By regulation, if a religious structure is to be demolished or relocated because of city planning or the construction of “key” projects, the party responsible for demolishing the structure must consult with its local bureau of religious affairs (guided by the SARA) and the religious group using the structure. If all parties agree to the demolition, the party conducting the demolition must agree to rebuild the structure or to provide compensation equal to its appraised market value.

The Regulations on Religious Affairs include registration requirements for schools that allow only the five state-sanctioned religious associations or their affiliates to form religious schools. Children younger than the age of 18 are prohibited from participating in religious activities and receiving religious education, even in schools run by religious organizations. One regulation states that no individual may use religion to hinder the national education system and that no religious activities may be held in schools. The law mandates the teaching of atheism in schools, and a CCP directive provides guidance to universities on how to prevent foreign proselytizing of university students. The SARA also issued new regulations on September 1 entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Schools” that stipulate religious schools should ensure CCP ideological training is included in all religious education, including required classes on Xi Jinping Thought, ideological and political theory, and socialism.

The Regulations on Religious Affairs of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region state, “Minors shall not participate in religious activities. No organization or individual may organize, induce or force minors to participate in religious activities.” Minors are also prohibited from entering religious venues. Multiple provinces send letters instructing parents that “teachers and parents should strictly enforce the principle of separation between education and religion and ensure that minors are not allowed to enter religious places, participate in religious activities, or to attend religious trainings.” Individuals, including parents, who violate these regulations may be criminally liable. Implementation of these rules, however, varies greatly across and within regions.

On September 1, the Ministry of Education published the “Administrative Measures for Off-campus Training Materials for Primary and Secondary School Students.” “Off-campus training” refers to private tutoring services designed to help students prepare for entrance exams. The regulations prohibit private tutors, including those based abroad, from using textbooks “propagating religious teachings, doctrines, canons, or *xie jiao*, or feudal superstitions, etc.”

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

In 2020, the Administrative Measures for Religious Groups went into effect. These measures comprise six chapters and 41 articles dealing with the organization, function, offices, supervision, projects, and economic administration of communities and groups at the national and local levels. The measures state that only registered groups may operate legally and stipulate that religious organizations must support the leadership of the CCP, adhere to the direction of Sinicization, and implement the values of socialism. Article 17 states that religious organizations shall “follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, abide by laws, regulations, rules, and policies, correctly handle the relationship between national law and canon, and enhance national awareness, awareness of the rule of law, and citizenship.”

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). With respect to Macau, the central government notified the UN Secretary-General, in part, that residents of Macau shall not be restricted in the rights and freedoms they are entitled to unless otherwise provided for by law, and in case of restrictions, the restrictions shall not contravene the ICCPR. With respect to Hong Kong, the central government notified the Secretary-General, in part, that the ICCPR would also apply to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Government Practices

Authorities continued to arrest and otherwise detain leaders and members of religious groups, often those connected with groups not registered with the state-sanctioned religious associations. Authorities reportedly used vague or insubstantial charges, sometimes in connection with religious activity, to convict and sentence leaders and members of religious groups to years in prison.

NGOs, religious groups, and media sources continued to report deaths in custody, enforced disappearances (often through “residential surveillance at a designated location” – a form of black-site detention utilized by authorities against individuals accused of endangering state security), and organ harvesting in prison of individuals whom authorities targeted based on their religious beliefs or affiliation. NGOs and media reported authorities used violence during arrests and tortured detainees, including by forcing them to maintain stress positions, beating them, and depriving them of food, water, and sleep. NGOs reported that some previously detained individuals were denied freedom of movement even after their release.

The NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers estimated that the government imprisoned 2,987 individuals for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief as of December 7.

The Political Prisoner Database of the human rights NGO Dui Hua Foundation counted 3,793 individuals imprisoned as of September 30 for “unorthodox” religious beliefs, including 2,751 Falun Gong practitioners, 578 CAG members, and 147 members of other Protestant groups.

Minghui reported 101 Falun Gong practitioners died as a result of persecution suffered because of their faith, compared with 107 in 2020. It also reported that authorities arrested 5,045 (8,160 in 2020) and harassed 9,245 (10,973 in 2020) Falun Gong practitioners during the year. The Falun Dafa Infocenter reported police arrested more than 5,000 practitioners and harassed more than 9,000 others during the year.

Minghui stated police often used violence during arrests of Falun Gong practitioners and that individuals were tortured in custody. Police in Anyang City, Henan Province, arrested shopkeeper Li Xianxi on May 11 for talking about Falun Gong in a market. When he performed Falun Gong exercises at the local detention center following his arrest, authorities handcuffed and shackled him. On June 13, authorities informed his family that Li had died on June 12. According to those who saw his body, he was emaciated, his head was swollen, and there were injuries to his back and knees.

Bitter Winter, an online publication that tracks religious liberty and human rights abuses in the country, reported that on April 12, authorities informed the family of Colonel Gong Piqi, a Falun Gong practitioner and former deputy chief of staff of the Shandong Provincial Reserve Artillery Division, that Gong had died in prison. He had been forced to retire when authorities discovered he was a practitioner. Authorities arrested Gong in 2017 and sentenced him in 2018 to seven and a half years and a fine of RMB 20,000 (\$3,100) for being active in a banned religious group. According to

authorities, Gong experienced a “sudden cerebral hemorrhage” and died despite receiving medical treatment. His family and friends reported seeing signs of torture on his body, causing them to doubt he died of natural causes.

Minghui reported that Hubei Province resident Hu Hanjiao died in prison while serving a four-year sentence for practicing Falun Gong. Authorities arrested Hu on March 15 for talking to people about Falun Gong and the Xiaochang County Court sentenced her in late June. During the seven months authorities held her at the Hanchuan City Detention Center, Hu staged a hunger strike in protest and was force fed. Thirteen days after she was transferred to the Hubei Province Women’s Prison, prison authorities called Hu’s husband to inform him she had died. They refused to release her body to her family.

In June, *Bitter Winter* reported that government and police officers confirmed that, in the context of the 100th anniversary of the CCP’s founding, the government ordered increased arrests for members of all dissident groups, particularly CAG members. One document issued by the Office of State Security in Shanxi Province ordered officials to “put real efforts to strengthen surveillance over key personnel and carry out a severe crackdown on The Church of Almighty God.” According to *Bitter Winter*, authorities throughout the country arrested more than 1,000 CAG members in the first half of the year. From May 19 to 25, Guangdong Province police arrested approximately 160 CAG members in Foshan, Guangzhou, Zhuhai, and other cities. Authorities also arrested 403 CAG members in Shanxi Province from the beginning of the year through June, and at least 265 CAG members in Henan Province from mid-April to mid-June. In April, the government in Anhui Province arrested at least 116 CAG members after a long-term surveillance and tracking operation and confiscated at least RMB 750,000 (\$118,000) of church and personal assets.

During the year, *Bitter Winter* reported on several cases of authorities imprisoning CAG members, pressuring them to sign statements renouncing their faith, and subjecting them to psychological and physical abuse, including beatings and stress positions, when they refused. One CAG member from the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region said during his imprisonment, a guard tightly wrapped a copper wire as thick as a little finger around his body five times, cutting off his circulation. After authorities forced him to stand for four hours, the man’s legs became swollen, his hands were numb and trembling, and his abdomen became numb to the touch. One CAG member from Anhui Province said authorities forced her into a stress position eight hours a day for five consecutive days during which she had to squat while keeping her torso upright, her hands raised above her head, and her body unmoving. Another CAG member reported being deprived of sleep for five nights. Two CAG members said when they refused to sign a statement renouncing their faith, guards encouraged fellow inmates to beat them, resulting in bruises and broken teeth. Another CAG member described fellow prisoners, at the guards’ instigation, smearing feces on his body.

In April, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported authorities in Sichuan Province detained members of Christian house churches in unofficial detention facilities where they pressured individuals to renounce their faith. One Protestant individual said authorities held him in a windowless basement for eight or nine months, during which time they physically and mentally abused him. He said, “You can’t see the sun, so you lose all concept of time,” and that suicidal thoughts and self-harm among detainees were commonplace. Secret police attempted to coerce inmates into signing confessions of guilt and held those who refused in solitary confinement for prolonged periods. Another Christian told RFA that similar facilities were being used to abuse members of the underground Catholic Church and Falun Gong practitioners.

According to the annual report released by the CAG, during the year, at least 68,456 Church members were directly persecuted by authorities, compared with at least 42,807 in 2020. The report stated that authorities harassed at least 57,300 Church members (at least 35,752 in 2020), arrested 11,156 (7,055 in 2020), detained 3,636 (4,045 in 2020), tortured or subjected to forced indoctrination 6,125 (5,587 in 2020), sentenced 1,452 (1,098 in 2020), and seized at least RMB 250 million (\$39.23 million) in Church and personal assets. At least nine Church members died as a result of being physically abused during detention (at least 21 in 2020).

The NGO ChinaAid reported that on May 23, police in Guiyang, Guizhou Province, arrested Pastor Yang Hua of the Guiyang Living Stone Church for conducting religious activities. At the station, leaders of the Guiyang Yunyan District Party Committee reportedly struck Yang, causing injuries that required medical attention.

Media reported authorities used measures ostensibly intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including facial recognition software and telephone tracking, to identify and arrest members of unregistered or banned religious groups. The government installed surveillance cameras outside unregistered churches during the pandemic.

Bitter Winter reported that on June 7, the Qinnan District People’s Court in Qinzhou City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, sentenced 21 members of the Blood and Water of Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit Full Gospel Evangelistic Group to prison for being active in a cult. They were part of a

group of Church members detained by the Qinnan Branch of the Qinzhou Public Security Bureau in August 2020. Police also seized 113 books, 989 loose “propaganda materials,” 183 CDs, 3 calendars, 2 diaries, and 48 signs, among other items. The movement was founded in Taiwan and the government declared it a cult in 1995.

According to *Minghui*, police arrested and harassed Falun Gong practitioners throughout the country. Harassment spiked in April and May, around the “sensitive dates” of April 25, the anniversary of 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners’ appealing in 1999 outside the central government compound for the right to practice their beliefs, and May 13, the 29th anniversary of Falun Gong’s introduction to the public. According to *Minghui*, harassment was also driven by the “stability maintenance” campaign prior to the CCP’s centennial anniversary. From July to August, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Shandong, Jilin, Sichuan, Shanxi, and Liaoning were the provinces where the highest number of practitioners were targeted. Those arrested included teachers, restaurateurs, librarians, construction workers, factory workers, academics, nurses, engineers, farmers, shop owners, and many retirees.

On September 12, *Minghui* reported multiple examples of police harassment and arrests of practitioners of Falun Gong. On March 10, police in Fushun City, Liaoning Province, arrested Yang Xiaozhi for distributing Falun Gong materials. She reported that detention officers shocked her with electric batons before releasing her on bail on March 15. On May 14, police in Jilin City, Jilin Province, arrested 98-year-old Cai Xiufang for talking to people about Falun Gong. They held her in a metal cage at the police station for several hours and ransacked her home before releasing her on bail. Authorities arrested Gong Ruiping, a former elementary school teacher in Beijing, on July 20 in connection with practicing Falun Gong. Guards force fed her when she attempted a hunger strike. On July 23, authorities arrested Li Lihong, a middle school teacher in Ningxiang City, Hunan Province, for talking to people about Falun Gong. *Minghui* reported that Baimaqiao police station head Zhang Jie threatened to shoot and kill her. On August 15, a plainclothes police officer in Handan City, Hebei Province, beat Wang Shuqin for talking to him about Falun Gong. Wang suffered two broken ribs and was taken to the hospital.

ChinaAid reported that in January in Hengyang City, Hunan Province, officials detained Chen Wensheng for 25 days for preaching Christian teachings on the streets. Following his release from detention on January 29, local authorities came to his home to persuade him to stop “street evangelism.”

On June 14, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights published a statement from a group of 11 UN-affiliated independent human rights experts, including UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Ahmed Shaheed, who were “alarmed by reports of alleged organ harvesting targeting minorities including Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Muslims, and Christians, in detention in China.” The independent experts reported receiving credible information from NGOs and activists stating that authorities “may have forcibly subjected... detainees from ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities” to blood tests and organ examinations such as ultrasounds and x-rays without their informed consent, while other prisoners were not required to undergo such examinations. The results of the examinations were reportedly registered in a database of living organ sources that facilitated organ allocation. The independent experts stated, “According to the allegations received, the most common organs removed from the prisoners are reportedly hearts, kidneys, livers, corneas and, less commonly, parts of livers. This form of trafficking with a medical nature allegedly involves health sector professionals, including surgeons, anaesthetists and other medical specialists.” The experts said that despite the gradual development of a voluntary organ donation system, “[I]nformation continues to emerge regarding serious human rights violations in the procurement of organs for transplants in China,” and concern remained at the lack of independent oversight as to whether consent to donation and organ allocation was effectively given by prisoners or detainees. The experts noted that authorities reportedly prevented families of deceased detainees and prisoners from claiming their bodies.

On August 9, the government responded to the High Commissioner, asserting the experts’ report was “based on false information and makes groundless accusations against China” and was “filled with malice and prejudice.” The government said witnesses were “‘actors’ who repeatedly engage in slander and rumour-mongering on the issue of human rights in China[.]” The government stated that regulations required medical examinations for persons entering detention facilities “for the purpose of determining the detainee’s physical condition at the time of admittance to the facility and providing prompt treatment in the event of illness.” It stated that, by law, organ donation was “voluntary and nonremunerative” and that organ trading and involuntary organ harvesting had been criminalized.

In July, *Minghui* reported authorities collected DNA, blood samples, and other biometrics from Falun Gong practitioners against their will. During the first half of the year, this reportedly occurred in 18 provinces and municipalities – Beijing, Shanghai, Shandong, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Zhejiang, Liaoning, Gansu, Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Guizhou, Hebei, Hubei, Henan, Shanxi, Sichuan, Guangdong, and Shaanxi. Between April 26 and 29, four practitioners in Shanghai reported police broke into their homes and

forcibly collected blood samples. Practitioners reported police also collected handwriting samples, fingerprints, height information, photographs, and phone numbers. According to *Minghui*, some practitioners suspected authorities were collecting these biometrics and blood samples to establish a DNA and organ matching database, as well as to enhance the surveillance of practitioners.

According to the CAG annual report, harassment of members included the collection of biological data, such as blood samples and hair.

The *Union of Catholic Asian News (UCA News)* reported local Catholic sources said authorities abducted Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Yongjia (Wenzhou) Diocese in Zhejiang Province on October 25 and held him incommunicado for two weeks before releasing him. Shao was ordained a bishop in 2011 with Vatican approval, but his appointment was not approved by the two state-sanctioned church bodies – the Bishops’ Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) and the CCPA – and he was not among the Vatican-approved bishops recognized by the CCPA as a result of the 2018 Sino-Vatican provisional agreement. According to *UCA News*, this was the seventh time since 2016 that authorities detained Shao, and his prior arrests stemmed from his refusal to join the CCPA.

Media reported the status of Catholic Bishop Taddeo Ma Daqin, whom authorities placed under house arrest in Shanghai following his resignation from the CCPA in 2012, remained unchanged at as of April.

RFA reported that on April 21, police in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, raided the Early Rain Covenant Church (ERCC) during a study session and detained 19 Church members, including 12 children. At the local police station, officers questioned the children without their parents present, in contravention of the law regarding detention of minors. According to a Church member, police released 16 of the 19 persons after detaining them for 11 hours and continued to hold three individuals without giving a reason to their families.

International Christian Concern reported that on August 22, police in Chengdu City entered the home of an ERCC member during a Sunday worship service and arrested 28 individuals, including 10 children. During the arrests, police injured Pastor Dai Zhichao on his arm and confiscated his mobile phone. An ERCC member said police beat many individuals in detention and when the children became unruly, officers threatened to hit them on their heads. Police held Dai and the homeowner, He Shan, in detention for 14 days and fined He RMB 1,000 (\$160) for holding an illegal religious gathering.

Bitter Winter reported that in May the Beijing Municipal Court sentenced Lin Xianzan, a member of the Shouters, to three years in prison for being active in a banned religious group.

There were reports that authorities continued to crack down on qigong movements that it classified as cults or equivalent to cults. *Bitter Winter* reported that on April 27, the Zhaouyan City People’s Court in Shandong Province sentenced Sun Xuhui to two years in prison after she confessed to leading a branch of Zhonggong, a qigong movement, and “brainwashing” followers. According to *Bitter Winter*, the Ministry of Public Security set up a special task force with anti-Zhonggong divisions in Beijing and Tianjin municipalities, and Yunnan, Hebei, Liaoning, and Shandong Provinces. In May, police in Luoyang, Henan Province, arrested several followers of the Buddhist master Tian Ruisheng (also known as Shijakai), and accused them of spreading the teachings of the banned movement Xiang Gong, originally known as Buddhist Qigong.

ChinaAid reported that on March 7, authorities in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, raided the Fountain of Life house church during a Sunday service and took Pastor Zha Changping, his wife, and three other church members to the local police station for questioning. Authorities released them after several hours.

According to *Bitter Winter*, authorities arrested 181 Association of Disciples members in a large operation carried out in late 2020 and early 2021 in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. They charged the members with being active in a cult. Authorities told local media the arrests were the result of the program implemented in 2018 to grant rewards up to RMB 50,000 (\$7,800) to those who denounced their neighbors or acquaintances as cult members; the program included a tip line for doing so.

On May 5, RFA reported that authorities arrested two elders of Zion Church in Beijing, as well as elder Zhang Chunlei of the Renai Reformed Church in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province, on suspicion of fraud. Zhang’s defense attorney said the fraud accusations were related to his receiving his living allowance from member donations and said, “This [practice] happens in all religions, and it doesn’t constitute fraud.”

Bitter Winter reported that authorities arrested 10 teachers at a Christian school in Wuhu City, Anhui Province, on May 27. Authorities claimed the school was an illegal operation because it was not affiliated with the TSPM. According to *Bitter Winter*, local Christians viewed the raid as part of a larger

crackdown on all forms of education not directly controlled by the CCP.

On May 27, a ChinaAid source reported the arrests and imprisonment of numerous Christians affiliated with the Local Assembly, a house church, in Wuxi City, Jiangsu Province, Nanning City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and Beijing, accusing them of “using a cult to undermine the enforcement of law.”

ChinaAid reported that on November 16, the Xi'an Municipal Intermediate Court in Shaanxi Province upheld a lower court's sentencing of Chang Yuchun and Li Chenhui to seven years' imprisonment and a RMB 250,000 (\$39,200) fine for an “illegal business operation.” Chang and Li printed and sold Christian books from 2015 to 2020, when local police shut down their business, confiscated more than 210,000 books, and forcibly disappeared them into “residential surveillance at a designated location.”

On August 7, RFA reported that police in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province, detained nine Golden Lamppost Church leaders and members who refused to join the TSPM, including Pastor Wang Xiaoguang and preacher Yang Rongli. According to sources, the group was carrying out a house church baptism when police arrested them. Shortly afterwards, local authorities used dynamite to demolish a Golden Lamppost church in Taiyuan City. On September 27, police arrested seven Church members. On December 27, authorities charged them with fraud. RFA said the detentions and demolition came amid a series of raids on unofficial Protestant house churches in Linfen County, Shanxi Province.

Bitter Winter reported on that on August 14, a court in Kaili City, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Guizhou Province, convicted four Seventh-day Adventist Church clergy of fraud for collecting offerings outside of the purview of the TSPM. The court sentenced one member to 12 years in prison, and the others to three to six years.

In November, *Minghui* reported that on October 14, nine officials came to Yi Shuying's home and ordered her to sign a letter renouncing Falun Gong. They threatened officials would deny her granddaughter, a junior high school student, admission to college in the future if Yi did not renounce Falun Gong. Yi refused to comply.

In June, ChinaAid reported that ERCC Pastor Wang Yi, whom authorities sentenced to nine years in prison in December 2019, was “being treated very badly in prison,” held in solitary confinement in Chengdu Province's Jintang Prison under constant supervision, and malnourished. ChinaAid stated prison officials continued to prevent family members and lawyers from visiting him and withheld medical treatment. According to the NGO International Christian Concern, since his arrest, Wang's wife and child were living in an unknown location, under surveillance.

On April 20, RFA reported the police department of Yulin City, Shaanxi Province, confirmed to his wife that it was still detaining Gao Zhisheng, a human rights lawyer taken into custody in September 2017. Previously, Gao's family had not known his whereabouts or whether he was alive. Gao had previously defended on-trial members of Christian groups, Falun Gong practitioners, and other minority groups.

On July 20, ChinaAid reported that the Xiamen City religious affairs bureau fined Pastor Yang Xibo of Xingguang Church, an unregistered church in Xiamen City, Fujian Province, and his wife RMB 200,000 (\$31,400) for organizing an “illegal religious activity.” According to RFA, several dozen state security police and officials from the local religious affairs bureau raided worship services at the church in April and May 2020. Yang told RFA the congregation was targeted for refusing to join the state-sanctioned TSPM.

During the year, authorities continued to detain Hui Muslim poet Cui Haoxin, known by his pen name An Ran, for Twitter posts in which he criticized the government for the imprisonment, surveillance, and persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang and throughout the country. Authorities took Cui into custody in January 2020 and accused him of “picking quarrels and stirring up trouble.”

On April 9, *Bitter Winter* published an article in which it described several CAG members being forced to perform labor during their imprisonment. One CAG member said she had to produce 250 artificial flowers per day, and if she failed to reach her quota, authorities forced her to stand four to six hours per night. The article stated that the plastic used in the artificial flowers contained chemicals and heavy metal elements harmful to the human body, such as vinyl chloride, formaldehyde, and lead, leading to endocrine disorders, decreased immunity, aplastic anemia, leukemia, and other blood diseases. The report also stated that exposure to the chemicals disrupted women's menstrual cycles. Another female CAG member who was sentenced to three years in a women's prison described working on 550 dresses per day in a dressmaking shop while standing for 13 hours. After her release, she was diagnosed with a herniated disc, which caused her pain if she sat for more than 10 minutes.

AsiaNews reported that the new SARA regulations entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” which took effect on May 1, placed additional ideological controls over the training, selection, and monitoring of clergy, including emphasizing allegiance to the CCP and socialism. The new regulations also stipulated the government would hold religious organizations and institutions responsible for the behavior of clergy and created a new centralized database to record information about clergy, as well as to track their behavior and “misdeeds.” Local governments were instructed to update the database with information on “rewards and punishments” of clergy. On February 11, *Bitter Winter* published an English-language translation and analysis of the new regulations. According to *Bitter Winter*, registration in the government database was “complicated.” Individuals who were not listed in it but claimed to be clergy would be committing a crime. Individuals unable to obtain a “clergy card” would include anyone not belonging to one of the five officially recognized patriotic religious associations, such as pastors of Protestant house churches, Catholics who rejected the government’s 2018 provisional agreement with the Holy See and refused to join the CCPA, teachers and clergy at independent mosques and Buddhist and Taoist temples, rabbis, and religious personnel of new religious movements. According to *AsiaNews*, “living buddhas,” under the regulations, “will not be able to exercise any ministry, nor will they be considered true reincarnations without the permission of the [CCP].” According to *Bitter Winter*, individuals had to prove they “support[ed] the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and support[ed] the socialist system.” *Bitter Winter* stated the regulations created “an Orwellian system of surveillance, and strengthen[ed] the already strict control on all clergy.”

The SARA continued to maintain publicly available statistics on some, but not all, registered religious groups. According to the SARA, there were 42,439 Buddhist temples and 8,349 Taoist temples registered in the country as of year’s end. The SARA did not publish the number of registered Islamic mosques, Catholic churches, and Protestant churches. According to 2014 SARA statistics (the latest available), more than 5.7 million Catholics worshipped in sites registered to the CCPA. The SCIO’s April 2018 white paper stated approximately 144,000 places of worship were registered to conduct religious activities in the country, among which were 33,500 Buddhist temples (including 28,000 Han Buddhist temples, 3,800 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, and 1,700 Theravada Buddhist temples), 9,000 Taoist temples, 35,000 mosques, 6,000 CCPA churches and places of assembly spread across 98 dioceses, and 60,000 TSPM churches and places of assembly. The SCIO white paper also estimated there were more than 384,000 religious personnel in the country: 222,000 Buddhist, 40,000 Taoist, 57,000 Islamic, 57,000 Protestant, and 8,000 Catholic.

The government continued to close down or hinder the activities of religious groups not affiliated with the state-sanctioned religious associations, including unregistered Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, and other groups. At times, authorities said they shuttered a group because the group or its activities were unregistered; at other times, because the place of worship lacked necessary permits. Some local governments continued to restrict the growth of unregistered Protestant church networks and cross-congregational affiliations. Authorities allowed some unregistered groups to operate but did not recognize them legally. In some cases, authorities required unregistered religious groups to disband, leaving congregants from these groups with the sole option of attending services under a state-sanctioned religious leader.

International media and NGOs reported the government continued to carry out its nationwide campaign to “Sinicize religion” by altering doctrines and practices across all faith traditions to conform to and bolster CCP ideology and emphasize loyalty to the CCP and the state. The CCP’s Administrative Measures for Religious Groups, promulgated in 2020, further formalized the administrative procedures for Sinicizing all religions. Commenting on the administrative measures, one Catholic Priest told *AsiaNews*, “In practice, your religion no longer matters, if you are Buddhist, or Taoist, or Muslim or Christian; the only religion allowed is faith in the Chinese Communist Party.”

The five-year plan to promote the Sinicization of Christianity, issued in 2018, called for “incorporating Chinese elements into church worship services, hymns and songs, clerical attire, and the architectural style of church buildings,” and it proposed to “retranslate the Bible or rewrite biblical commentaries.” On its website in 2018, the TSPM pledged to “cultivate and practice core socialist values,” “carry out patriotic education,” and incorporate Sinicization into Christian theology, TSPM rules and regulations, theological education, and believers’ faith practice via symposiums, seminars, essay contests, and commemorative activities such as art exhibitions. During the year, the TSPM celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP and sponsored activities to “cultivate a Christian charity culture with Chinese characteristics.” The TSPM website stated that in 2022, it planned to examine experiences of Sinicization in various regions, determine best practices from the 2018-2022 five-year plan, and formulate a 2023-2027 work plan for further promoting the Sinicization of Christianity.

On March 31, the *Economist* reported that the government targeted all religions for Sinicization and instructed Christian preachers to promote “core socialist values.” The *Economist* stated that government policy dictated “[i]nterpretations of the Bible should become more Sinified – meaning, presumably, that they should help to bolster belief in socialism.” Authorities required state-approved

churches to display national flags and portraits of President Xi, a move some TSPM pastors resisted, and encouraged them “to use Chinese architecture and Chinese tunes for hymns, as well as Chinese-style painting, calligraphy and other ‘popular cultural forms.’” According to the *Economist*, despite increased pressure on house churches, authorities faced difficulties imposing Sinification on these unofficial, unregulated religious communities.

UCA News reported that according to the state-controlled BCCCC and the CCPA, on September 24, Catholics from two churches in Zibo City, Shandong Province, attended an event organized by the BCCCC called “One Hundred Sermons” that sought to explain President Xi’s instructions on religious activities and the promotion of Sinicization in the Catholic Church and how to adapt Catholicism to the socialist society. On September 27-29, 18 key members of the CCPA from various provinces and cities met in Xibaipo village, Hebei Province, for an educational program based on the theme, “Take the Red Footprints and Inherit the Red Spirit,” intended to cultivate positive feelings toward the CCP, patriotism, and socialism.

According to *Bitter Winter*, in some parts of the country, local authorities regularly reviewed sermons of TSPM pastors to ensure they were consistent with CCP ideology and contained praise for government leaders. *Bitter Winter* reported that on October 26, authorities in Shangqiu City, Henan Province, held a “Sinicization Seminar and Exchange Conference” for TSPM pastors and teachers. During the conference, participants raised the national flag and sang patriotic songs. Authorities told participants Christian social teaching should be Sinicized and that they would establish a “Research Office of Sinicization of Christianity” in Shangqiu. They said sermons should be preached on socialist themes.

Bitter Winter reported that at the national conference of the TSPM and the China Christian Council on July 8, state-appointed heads of the TSPM and the council ordered pastors to study and preach about President Xi’s July 1 speech on the 100th anniversary of the CCP’s founding. During the conference, religious authorities told pastors to make President Xi’s speech a principal topic of sermons and Bible study groups. TSPM chairman Xu Xiaohong offered pastors a model sermon based on nine points in the speech that glorified the nation, the CCP, and President Xi. He said pastors should instruct Christians to say, “Long live the great, glorious, and correct Chinese Communist Party. Long live the great, glorious, and heroic Chinese people.” Wu Wei, chairman of the China Christian Council, said pastors should direct Christians in “thanking God for putting us in this great era” and “continuing to learn the spirit of General Secretary Xi’s speech.”

Bitter Winter reported that on October 29 in Tianjin Municipality, Huasheng Temple authorities required Buddhist monks to watch a film entitled, “The Battle at Lake Changjin.” On its WeChat account, the temple stated the activity was “to carry out in-depth education on Party history and promote the spirit of patriotism.” The film depicted the “story of Chinese soldiers defeating American troops, despite great odds” at the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir during the Korean War. One monk told *Bitter Winter*, “Party classes are supposed to be an activity that only Communist Party members need to attend. Compelling monks to take a Party movie class is something incestuous, making the temple look like a branch of the Communist Party.”

According to the UFWD, from May 20-24, the Nanhai Buddhist Academy held a training session for more than 50 Buddhist deacons in Hainan Province. The training, themed “Love the Party, Love the Country, Love Socialism,” included studying President Xi’s speeches and PRC religious laws and regulations and viewing patriotic documentary films. Deputy minister of the provincial UFWD Liu Geng praised the Party, urged attendees to learn its history, promoted the Sinicization of religion, and advocated for socialist values in religious settings. He urged the deacons to be “politically reliable, religiously accomplished, and morally convincing.”

According to the religious affairs bureau of Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, on August 11, the Guangdong Taoist Association hosted an interfaith conference on the theme “Love the Party, the Country, and Socialism” to study Xi Jinping’s speech commemorating the 100th anniversary of the CCP’s founding, and to view “patriotic” films and exhibits. The chairmen, vice chairmen, and secretaries general of the Guangdong Buddhist Association, Islamic Association, Catholic Association, and Christian Association attended. Participants vowed to promote Sinicization in their respective religious teachings.

According to the Haixia Buddhist Network website, on February 26, monks and employees of Guangdong Buddhist Association and Guangxiao Temple in Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP by watching a video lecture on CCP history presented by the Central Party School. According to the network’s website, monks in attendance said the CCP’s history was “a history of seeking happiness for the people” and that “the Chinese people have become prosperous and strong under the leadership of the CCP.” Master Mingsheng, president of the Guangdong Buddhist Association, called on Buddhists to adhere to the Sinicization of Buddhism and to “guide Buddhism to be compatible with Socialism.”

According to a TSPM news outlet, the Guangdong Provincial Two Christian Councils held a ceremony at the Guangdong Union Theological Seminary on March 5 to launch a series of programs celebrating the CCP's 100th anniversary. Pastoral personnel and approximately 200 teachers and students participated. The programs included lectures on Party history and a knowledge contest on the themes of "knowing the Party's history, feeling the Party's favor, listening to the Party, and following the Party." There was also a seminar on the Sinicization of Christianity. Pastor Fan Hongen told participants the Guangdong Provincial Two Christian Councils was actively adapting to socialist society and strengthening the mission of Sinicizing Christianity.

According to ChinaAid, on June 25, the TSPM-affiliated Shandong Theological Seminary in Shandong Province held a theatrical performance with the theme of "Sing a Praise to the Party" to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the CCP's founding.

According to the UFWD of Guangdong Province, from March 22 to 28, the Guangdong Islamic Association organized imam training classes at the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Socialism. Thirty-six imams from nine cities in the province attended the one-week training session, at which they studied the history of the CCP, socialism, and how to "adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of Guangdong Islam." Imams attending the training said they would "unswervingly" listen to the Party.

According to the CCPA website, the Guangdong Catholic Association celebrated the 100th anniversary of the CCP by organizing a CCP training session in Guangxi Province from April 12 to 16 for 40 priests from 21 different cities. The participants toured several CCP "red education" sites, learned the "heroic deeds of revolutionary martyrs," and were encouraged to "love the party."

In May, the Minnan Buddhist Institute, located in Nanputuo Buddhist Temple, Xiamen City, Fujian Province, held a public speaking contest on the theme of "studying the history of the Party, thanking the Party, and following the Party." Approximately 700 faculty members and students attended the contest to praise the Party's "brilliant history and great accomplishments," according to the Nanputuo Buddhist Temple's website. RFA reported that a Shandong monk criticized the contest, saying that the Buddhist Institute coerced monks into participating. He stated that the institute would prohibit students who did not participate from studying there.

Media reported that throughout the year, crackdowns on some churches with foreign ties intensified significantly throughout the country. Many religious groups, including groups connected to the five "patriotic religious associations," faced comprehensive investigations that included checking their background, organizational setting, membership, online evangelism, and finances. On April 3, International Christian Concern reported that the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) planned to intensify efforts to shut down social organizations, private nonenterprise units, and foundations that were not registered with relevant authorities. Organizations that had their registration revoked but nevertheless continued with their activities would also be targeted, the ministry said. According to RFA, "The MCA's latest campaign has already begun in some provinces, such as Sichuan. The Department of Civil Affairs in Sichuan published a list of 84 'Illegal Social Organizations' on March 25 which contain[ed] several Buddhist and Christian groups, including the heavily persecuted house church Early Rain Covenant Church."

ChinaAid reported that authorities continued to harass members of the Trinity Gospel Harvest Church in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province, during the year. On March 1, security officials warned members against gathering to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Church's founding. On April 25, police and religious affairs officers raided Church services and detained pastors Mao Zhibin and Cao Yuan and eight members for questioning, without explanation. On July 11, authorities again raided Sunday worship services. The government formally banned the Church at the end of April. According to ChinaAid, in May, authorities closed a beach where baptisms of new members were to take place in order to prevent the baptisms, causing the group to move to another beach. In September, under instructions from the local police, a Shenzhen hotel refused service to Church members and refunded fees they paid to stay there.

Bitter Winter reported authorities cracked down on religious groups that organized prayer meetings in hotel rooms. On March 16 in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province, the Renai Reformed Church organized a prayer meeting in the Wenzhou Hotel complex. Police raided the room and arrested several congregants. When Church elder Zhang Chunlei went to the station to negotiate the release of the Church members, police arrested him as well and held him in detention for 15 days. They raided the houses of followers and confiscated computers and religious materials. Reporting on the same March 16 raid, RFA said officials stated they detained the individuals because gatherings were restricted to family members due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In October, ChinaAid reported that the local government of Jiake village, Yunnan Province, the TSPM, and the Chinese Christian Council banned Kai Yiduo from taking part in religious activities in what ChinaAid said was retribution for his dispute with the local government. Yiduo said the government had not compensated him after demolishing his home.

In November, the *Jerusalem Post* reported that authorities again did not permit Jews in Kaifeng City, Henan Province, to celebrate Hanukkah. Sources reported that on November 28, the Jewish community in Shanghai was able to hold a Hannukah commemoration.

In September, *Bitter Winter* reported the China Christian Council instructed all churches and congregations to “organize worship activities” to commemorate the 76th anniversary of China’s victory over Japan in World War II and to “further promote the fine tradition of patriotism and love of religion and to demonstrate the good image of peace-loving Christianity in China.” The directive stated, “Churches are requested to submit evidence of the relevant activities (text, video and photo materials) to the Media Ministry Department of the China Christian Council by September 10.” A photograph accompanying the *Bitter Winter* article showed students at Fujian Theological Seminary in Fujian Province praying for Red Army “martyrs.”

Throughout the year, the government closed venues throughout the country, including religious venues, and prohibited mass gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Media reported authorities tried to stop many religious groups from congregating or holding services online during the COVID-19 lockdown. According to media, in some localities, government officials used COVID-19 precautions as a pretext to prevent religious organizations from recommencing their activities long after restrictions had been lifted in analogous nonreligious contexts. According to the *National Catholic Reporter*, authorities prevented Catholics from celebrating the Feast of Mary on May 24 at the Sheshan Shrine in Shanghai, the country’s most famous Marian shrine and traditionally a pilgrimage site. Authorities cited the COVID-19 pandemic, but critics noted the government permitted amusement parks and a golf club in the area to remain open during the same period. There was at least one case, however, where authorities relaxed restrictions: when monks at the Shenyang Ci’en Buddhist Temple in Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, declared, “Monks and believers love the Party and will continue to follow the party to accomplish Sinicization,” government officials authorized them to resume large-scale services.

One source said the government used COVID-19 prevention as a pretext to close Islamic venues, particularly in Qinghai and Gansu Provinces and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, where Hui Muslims are concentrated, while allowing Buddhist temples to remain open.

RFA reported that on April 30, officials in Yunnan Province shut down the Bulai Protestant Church in Lao Mudan village, Fugong County, ostensibly to prevent the spread of COVID-19, despite the church’s having been allowed to meet previously throughout the pandemic. *China Christian Daily* reported that on August 1, an unregistered church in Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province, was forced to interrupt its on-site Sunday service when local officials, citing “reducing crowds for epidemic prevention and control,” cut off the electricity and pasted seals on the doors. Authorities also suspended services at other local churches in Suzhou, *China Christian Daily* reported.

According to the *Economist*, many house churches held services online and there were numerous Bible study groups and church forums on WeChat. Some unauthorized seminaries and missionary training schools moved online. One pastor said some online congregations were 50 percent larger than in-person meetings. However, in March, Open Doors USA reported officials monitored online activities and “even officially registered churches were ordered to stop online services.”

In December, *Bitter Winter* reported that authorities, citing the COVID-19 pandemic, took measures to stop Christians from gathering for Christmas celebrations, although they allowed some musical and cultural events to take place in what *Bitter Winter* described as “cosmetic” activities designed to give the appearance of religious tolerance. *Bitter Winter* reported that authorities in Rong’an County, Liuzhou City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region ordered elementary and kindergarten teachers and students not to celebrate Christmas at school or at home, calling the holiday a “Western celebration.” The directive included the name and contact number for a tip line for people to report individuals “doing any event” for Christmas.

Media and human rights organizations reported SARA regulations stating that only the Islamic Association of China was permitted to organize Muslim pilgrimage trips, issued in 2020, remained in effect. The regulations stated that those who applied to join the Hajj must be “patriotic, law-abiding, and have good conduct,” must have never before participated in the Hajj, and be in sound physical and mental health. They also had to be able to pay all costs associated with Hajj travel and to oppose religious extremism. According to a notice issued by the Islamic Association of China on June 15, citing the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government suspended all Hajj activities during the year.

The government continued to label several religious groups, including the CAG, Shouters, Association of Disciples, All-Sphere Church, and many others, as cults or xie jiao organizations. The government also continued to ban groups, such as Falun Gong, that it classified as illegal organizations.

Bitter Winter reported that on July 26, the Supreme People's Court published its "Opinion on Providing Judicial Services and Protection for Accelerating the Modernization of Agriculture and Rural Areas." The "opinion" included provisions to "intensify the punishment of illegal religious activities and overseas infiltration activities" in rural areas, "crack down on organizing and using xie jiao organizations to commit crimes," and "stop the use of religion and xie jiao from interfering in rural public affairs."

Bitter Winter reported that on October 23, approximately 100 children from preschools of the district of Jiaocheng in Ningde City, Fujian Province, underwent a program of "preventive education." The children, ages three to six, received picture booklets, viewed a panel exhibition, and watched cartoons warning against "xie jiao and illegal religion." One film presented the CAG as a cult, and others admonished against "superstition" and "illegal religion" in general.

Bitter Winter reported provincial governments shut down local branches of the Good News Mission, a Protestant religious group with ties to South Korea. On March 30, the Civil Affairs Bureau of Shaoxing City, Zhejiang Province, banned the group and raided local communities. On April 30, the government in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Jilin Province, announced prefecture authorities had banned the Good News Mission and shut down its churches. According to *Bitter Winter*, the Good News Mission was "not in the list of xie jiao, but it is now a common strategy to ban a religious movement in one region and province after the other, leading to a de facto national ban."

Bitter Winter reported authorities continued to link xie jiao to criminal activities and other social ills. In November, border police and "legal education" officers carried out a surveillance and propaganda operation in Ningming County, Guangxi Province, and Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, both on the border with Vietnam, prompted by what *Bitter Winter* said were fears that illegal religious groups might enter the country via Vietnam. The campaign against drug smuggling and HIV/AIDS included indoctrinating residents against "illegal religion" and xie jiao. It targeted 600,000 Hani, who hold predominantly shamanistic beliefs, and 900,000 Yi, who practice both Christianity and shamanistic religions.

Bitter Winter reported that on National Security Education Day on April 15, authorities mounted exhibitions as part of an anti-xie jiao campaign, and students across the country signed pledges to renounce illegal religious activities by groups labeled cults. Zhou Qiang, president of the Supreme People's Court, called cults "a cancer" and stated the CCP had three main targets: Falun Gong, CAG, and the Association of Disciples. He also said cults colluded with Western anti-China forces, and he accused the Association of Disciples of manipulating some local elections. The article included a photograph from the social media site Weibo showing students from Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications in Chongqing Province signing a large billboard pledging to renounce xie jiao.

State-run media reported that on September 10, Qiongsan District in Haikou City, Hainan Province, organized a series of anti-illicit drugs and anticult propaganda activities in middle schools. Government officials distributed brochures, hung propaganda banners, and gave lectures to teachers and students on how to recognize a cult and "consciously resist it."

Media reported that in June in Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, volunteers conducted large-scale COVID-19 testing at multiple locations, where they distributed educational literature warning against xie jiao alongside personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer. The volunteers reportedly posted signs publicizing an "anti-xie jiao" app, and digital billboards warned residents about the harmful influence of xie jiao and advised them to "be wary of cult organizations taking advantage of the epidemic to spread rumors and create chaos."

According to *Bitter Winter*, in October, prefecture-level city authorities in Hui'an County and nearby Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, launched an anti-xie jiao program as part of their celebration of the CCP's centennial anniversary. Teachers organized lessons in all elementary and middle schools and distributed propaganda material against *xie jiao* and "illegal religion." Individuals played a WeChat game in which they proved they had read the propaganda material by answering questions. Those who answered the most questions correctly won prizes. According to *Bitter Winter*, the names of those who scored low were sent to the local CCP secretaries. Local CCP officials said the initiative was needed because during the COVID-19 pandemic, "illegal religion" and xie jiao had increased in Fujian.

According to media, authorities maintained a near ubiquitous surveillance system through the development and widespread deployment of advanced technology such as artificial intelligence, CCTVs, and social media applications. In October, an academic who studies the subject told the *Diplomat* that domestic police departments in ethnic minority areas in Ningxia, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces and elsewhere purchased digital forensics tools to scan mobile phone hard drives for "more than 50,000 markers or patterns of illegal activity." More than 500 cities and municipalities across the country developed "smart city systems" that used forms of biometric surveillance that could surveil ethnic and religious minorities.

According to ChinaAid, on March 19, the Siming District Religious Affairs Bureau in Xiamen City, Fujian Province, released a circular that instructed police officers to patrol office buildings and hotels in the district on Saturday evenings and Sundays to prevent a resurgence of house church gatherings that were suppressed in past months and years. The circular identified several buildings and streets for priority patrol.

CBN News reported in August that the government encouraged citizens to report anyone distributing printed religious material or holding worship gatherings. Authorities offered informants RMB 1,000 (\$160). One Hui Muslim source said officials instructed children to report on their parents' and family's religious and cultural practices. ChinaAid reported that in early January, authorities in Shijiazhuang, Baoding, Xingtai, and other areas in Hebei Province encouraged the public to report house churches. Authorities in Xingtai issued a "Notice on Rewards for Reporting Religious Activities during the Epidemic," promising whistleblowers a reward of more than RMB 500 (\$78). In early August, authorities in Meilisi Daur District, Qiqihar City, Heilongjiang Province, announced a "Reward System for Reporting Illegal Religious Activities and Crimes," under which individuals could make reports by phone, email, or letter, and receive RMB 1,000 (\$160). According to ChinaAid, reportable violations included "unqualified religious personnel, unauthorized cross-regional activities, preaching and distribution of printed religious works, audiovisual products outside of worship venues, unauthorized donations, and private family gatherings."

In January, the Christian rights advocacy NGO World Watch Monitor reported authorities in Henan and Jiangxi Provinces placed surveillance cameras in all state-approved religious venues. Many of the cameras were reportedly installed next to standard CCTV cameras but were linked to the Public Security Bureau, meaning artificial intelligence could instantly connect with other government databases.

The *New York Times* reported in February that authorities in Sanya City, Hainan Province, continued to take measures against the 10,000-member, predominantly Muslim Utsul ethnic minority, including efforts to ban girls from wearing traditional dress, including hijabs and long skirts, in school. Signs on shops and homes that read "Allahu akbar" (God is greatest) in Arabic were covered with foot-wide stickers with the words "China Dream," a nationalistic official slogan. Restaurants removed the Chinese characters for halal from signs and menus. Authorities closed two Islamic schools. Local mosque leaders said authorities told them to remove loudspeakers that broadcast the call to prayer from the tops of minarets, place them on the ground, and turn down the volume. Authorities halted construction of a new mosque because of its supposedly "Arab" architectural elements. According to residents, the city barred children younger than 18 from studying Arabic. The restrictions followed a 2019 government-issued "Working Document Regarding the Strengthening of Overall Governance over Huixin and Huihui," which referred to the only two predominantly Utsul neighborhoods in the island province. One academic, commenting on the measures, told the *New York Times*, "This is about trying to strengthen state control. It's purely anti-Islam."

According to a *National Review* article published in July, the government continued to require churches to display banners with CCP slogans, perform the national anthem before singing Christian hymns, and "demonstrate their loyalty to the CCP above all, and only secondarily to the church." According to the *National Review*, "Consistent indoctrination and blatant submission to communist standards [was] spreading across all religious groups."

According to Open Doors USA, in Shanxi, Henan, and Jiangxi Provinces, authorities threatened Christians with the removal of social welfare benefits and pensions if they refused to replace Christian imagery, such as crosses, with pictures of Xi Jinping. One Christian on welfare assistance reported officials told him that since he believed in God, he should ask God for food instead of living off the CCP.

In April, *UCA News* reported that authorities in Zhaoxian City, Hebei Province, closed the House of the Dawn orphanage operated by Catholic nuns from the Sisters of the Child Jesus congregation, accusing the nuns of "illegal adoption practices." Local sources stated authorities actually closed the orphanage as part of a crackdown on church facilities operated by the unregistered Catholic Church. The orphanage served more than 100 children, many with special needs. According to *UCA News*, authorities accused Christian-run organizations of proselytizing and converting children through their social and charitable work.

According to ChinaAid, on September 4 in Harbin City, Heilongjiang Province, more than 30 CCP officials, including SWAT officers, police, religious affairs bureau officials, and local school district administrators, raided the Maizi Christian Music High School and arrested all staff members and several students. They seized school assets, including pianos, computers, and documents. Prior to the raid, police took the school's principal into custody. The students were released after 24 hours, but authorities held staff for questioning for several days. According to *AsiaNews*, there were reports authorities would charge the school principal with proselytizing.

Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible, the Quran, and other religious texts. The government continued to allow some foreign educational institutions to provide religious materials in Chinese, which were used by both registered and unregistered religious groups. During the year, however, many provinces conducted campaigns cracking down on “illegal religious publications” emanating from unofficial distribution channels.

ChinaAid reported in July that the Bao'an District Court in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province, found four Christian employees of the Shenzhen Life Tree Technology Development Company guilty of “illegal business” and gave them sentences ranging from fifteen months to up to six years in prison, with fines of up to RMB 200,000 (\$31,400). Authorities arrested the individuals in 2020 for illegally selling audio Bible players and confiscated their electronics and other belongings.

Local authorities throughout the country continued to ban the sale and display of religious couplets (banners with poetry) traditionally displayed during Lunar New Year. Local authorities threatened to fine or imprison anyone caught selling them. According to ChinaAid, officials in Pingdingshan, Henan Province, went house to house tearing couplets off the doors of Christian families that displayed faith-related messages.

In October, the BBC reported that Apple, at the request of the government, removed from its store the app Quran Majeed, which allows users to download the Quran. The media outlet stated, “The BBC understands that the app was removed for hosting illegal religious texts.” Apple declined to comment to the BBC.

Christian organizations seeking to use social media and smartphone apps to distribute Christian materials reported the government increased censorship of these materials. According to International Christian Concern, authorities removed Bible-related apps from app stores. Catholic News Agency reported in October that a digital Bible company removed its app from the Apple app store after Apple stated the company must demonstrate it had authorization from the government to distribute an app with book or magazine content in mainland China.

In May, International Christian Concern reported that according to a tweet by Father Francis Liu from the Chinese Christian Fellowship of Righteousness, the home pages of some Christian WeChat accounts, such as “Gospel League” and “Life Quarterly,” no longer showed any content. Instead, visitors saw a message reading, “[We] received a report that [this account] violates the ‘Internet User Public Account Information Services Management Provisions’ and its account has been blocked and suspended.”

China Christian Daily reported the government blocked many registered churches’ WeChat accounts during a crackdown on online Christian content. The banned accounts were managed by TSPM-approved churches in Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Yunnan Provinces. The Shanghai Pure Heart Church, Huai'an Church of Jiangsu Province, and Nanjing Holy Word Church of Jiangsu Province were among the churches whose official WeChat accounts that authorities blocked. “Today’s Nanjing Union Life,” the WeChat page of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, the only national Protestant seminary in the country, was inaccessible from May to the end of the year. China Christian Daily further reported that WeChat censored the words “Christ,” “gospel,” and “fellowship.” ChinaAid also reported that authorities blocked key words related to Christianity from search engines.

International Christian Concern stated Bibles in hard copy were not available for sale online and said TSPM-owned bookstores were increasingly selling books promoting Xi Jinping Thought and CCP ideology. According to International Christian Concern, “Even their WeChat accounts are turning into propaganda channels for CCP.”

ChinaAid reported that at the end of the year, a court upheld the initial verdict in the second trial of Chen Yu (also known as Zhang Xiaomai). Chen owned and operated the Xiaomai Bookstore in Linhai, Zhejiang Province, which sold Christian books online and in-store. In September 2019, the government arrested Chen for selling online “illegal religious overseas publications” and sentenced him to seven years in prison and a fine of RMB 200,000 (\$31,400). Authorities also confiscated 12,864 books and investigated more than 10,000 individuals who bought from Chen. Nationwide, authorities confiscated all copies Chen sold of ERCC Pastor Wang Yi’s *Transformation of the Gospel*.

ChinaAid reported that the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee censored information related to Christianity in school textbooks. In one textbook containing a picture of Michelangelo’s “Creation of Adam” on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, authorities changed the word in the description from “God” to “Old Man,” and in the description of a painting of the Virgin Mary and Jesus, they changed “Holy Mother and Holy Son” to “mother and son.”

A Hui Muslim source told international media the government was attempting to remove characteristics of Hui religion and culture to make Hui citizens indistinguishable from Han citizens, with whom they share physical characteristics and language. Authorities took down minarets and

domes and consolidated mosques. He said authorities trained clergy in Party doctrine and instructed them to pass those teachings on to their religious communities. The government targeted Hui cultural and business elites to remove Hui texts and art and cut off independent financial support to the community. The source called this a kind of “cultural genocide.”

On October 24, National Public Radio (NPR) reported that the government had removed domes and minarets from thousands of mosques across the country, saying these were evidence of “foreign religious influence,” and to replace them with more traditionally Chinese architectural features. Authorities removed the dome and minarets from the Dongguan Mosque in Xining City, Qinghai Province. According to one local resident, “The government says they want us to ‘Sinicize’ our mosques so that they look more like Beijing’s Tiananmen Square.” NPR stated the campaign coincided with rising anti-Muslim sentiment in the country and growing religious restrictions.

According to ChinaAid, on February 1, authorities for the second time removed a 100-year-old cross from Shuixin Church in Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province, against the wishes of the congregation. They first cut the building’s electricity and then took the church’s night watch staff into custody. According to one Christian observer, several security guards held one church member in a headlock and confiscated his mobile phone. They warned him, “Do not fight back. We are enforcing orders from higher officials.” Authorities had removed the cross in June 2014, but the church later reinstalled it.

ChinaAid reported that on July 28, authorities in Zhoushan City, Zhejiang Province, forced several fishermen to remove crosses from their privately owned fishing vessels. Authorities also erased “Emmanuel” slogans painted on boats and threatened that if the fishermen refused to cooperate, authorities would not grant them fishing permits or allow them to purchase gasoline for their boats. The authorities did not present any legal documents supporting their actions. The fishermen wrote on social media, “The government is completely unreasonable. Fishing boats are our personal property. We have the right to put crosses on our boats. Religious freedom is written in the constitution. However, it is just empty talk. The government never enforces the constitution.”

According to *Bitter Winter*, in January authorities sentenced Pastor Li Juncai of the Yuan Yang County House Church in Xinxiang City, Henan Province, to five and a half years in prison. In early 2019, Li had resisted government orders to remove the cross from his building and change the Church motto from “Love God and Love Others” to “Love the Country and Love Religion.” He also objected to constructing a stand within the church where a national flag would be placed. Authorities arrested Li in February 2019, and the Yuan Yang County prosecutor’s office charged him with “misappropriation of office, obstruction of official duties, and destruction of accounts.” He remained in jail until his trial. The court found him guilty on all three counts.

According to the SARA data, at year’s end, religious groups ran 87 schools in the country, including 37 Buddhist, 10 Taoist, 10 Islamic, nine Catholic, and 21 Protestant. Authorities barred students younger than 18 from receiving religious instruction, but enforcement and implementation of the prohibition varied widely across and within regions. According to the SARA, there were six national-level religious colleges. Although there were two CCPA seminaries in Beijing, civil society sources said one of these institutions was primarily used as CCPA propaganda for international visitors.

In March, Open Doors USA reported authorities using CCTV observed a woman in Shandong Province taking her child to a state-affiliated church. Officials reprimanded her for violating the ban on children participating in religious activities, such as attending church.

In May, *Bitter Winter* reported that police came to the home of Zhao Weikai, a worker at Taiyuan Reformed Church in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province, with an arrest warrant for “religious fraud.” Police arrested Zhao and confiscated his mobile phone and other items. They reportedly told Zhao to stop homeschooling minors, which is prohibited by law. Individuals present questioned the summons’ validity, saying that court officials had neither signed nor stamped it.

In November, ChinaAid reported that during the year, the government shut down several informal Christian schools. On May 27, authorities raided the Xuan De learning center, affiliated with the Wuhu Jiamishan Christian Church in Anhui Province. They confiscated books, computers, and mobile phones, and detained the school’s headmaster and teachers. On May 28, the Wuhu civil affairs bureau labeled the center an “illegal social organization,” and in July, the Wuhu local government deemed the Church an “illegal gathering.” On October 12, police arrested five educators from the Abeka Academy, a U.S.-based Christian homeschool education program in Zhenjiang City, Jiangsu Province, and detained children, parents, and teachers.

Individuals seeking to enroll at an official seminary or other institution of religious learning continued to be required to obtain the support of the corresponding state-sanctioned religious association. The government continued to require students to demonstrate “political reliability,” and

political issues were included in examinations of graduates from religious schools. Both registered and unregistered religious groups reported a shortage of trained clergy, due in part to government controls on admission to seminaries.

National regulations required Muslim clerics to meet the following requirements: “Uphold the leadership of the CCP; love Islam and serve Muslims; possess a degree in or receive formal training in Islamic scriptural education; have graduated from junior high school or above, in addition to attaining competency in Arabic; and be at least 22 years old.” According to sources, imams had to pass an exam testing their ideological knowledge to renew their license each year.

The government and the Holy See remained without formal diplomatic relations, and the Holy See had no official representative to the country. Media stated the SARA’s “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy” made no provision for the Vatican to have a role in the selection of Catholic bishops, despite the 2018 Sino-Vatican provisional agreement reportedly involving both Chinese authorities and the Holy See in the process of appointing bishops. *AsiaNews* stated the regulations undermined the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement. The news outlet said, “Even Catholic bishops, although ‘approved and ordained’ by the Council of Chinese Bishops, can only exercise their ministry after registering with the SARA. In this way, the state and not the Church retains management of the pastoral ministry of bishops.” According to *AsiaNews*, the provisions reenforced the distinction between official and unofficial priests and bishops, “thus endorsing and supporting the division imposed by the regime.” Some senior Chinese sources, however, told the Catholic news outlet *The Pillar* that the new rules would not invalidate the agreement. One Catholic cleric said provisions on financial management were aimed not at Catholic churches but rather at Buddhist temples, while those pertaining to “foreign domination” were aimed primarily at underground Protestant house churches. He said the government had omitted the Vatican from the regulations because the CCP would not want to publicly identify a foreign power in any way, despite coordinating on the selection of bishops.

Media reported that on May 20, authorities detained seven priests and an unspecified number of seminarians in Xinxiang City, Henan Province, for using an abandoned factory as a seminary to train priests. On May 21, they arrested Vatican-approved Bishop Joseph Zhang Weizhu. All were accused of violating the SARA’s May 1 regulation outlawing religious activities, including worship, in places not registered with the state. The CCPA does not recognize Xinxiang as a diocese, although it was created by the Vatican in 1936. Zhang was ordained by the Vatican as a bishop in 1991, but his appointment was not approved by the two state-sanctioned church bodies – the BCCCC and CCPA – and he was not among the Vatican-approved bishops recognized as a result of the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement.

Media reported in April that authorities in Cangnan County, Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province, fined Catholic Huang Ruixun RMB 200,000 (\$31,400) for offering his private chapel to Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin and approximately 20 worshippers to conduct services. They charged that the event was an illegal religious activity. Shao was ordained by the Vatican as Bishop of Yongjia/Wenzhou Diocese in 2016, but he was not among the Vatican-approved bishops recognized as a result of the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement.

On September 8, Franciscan Father Francis Cui Qingqi was ordained Bishop of Hankou/Wuhan Diocese, with the approval of the state and the Catholic Church, making him the sixth bishop ordained since the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement of 2018, and the fourth since it was extended in 2020. The Vatican press office director told journalists that Pope Francis appointed Cui on June 23, 2020. Media stated the state-sanctioned BCCCC had elected him “democratically” on September 27, 2020.

A number of Catholic clergy, including some bishops appointed by the Pope, remained unable or unwilling to register with the CCPA.

The *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) reported that during an August 27-28 conference on ethnic affairs attended by CCP leaders, legislators, and the political advisory body, including all seven Politburo Standing Committee members, President Xi told attendees to “continue to eradicate poisonous thoughts of ethnic separatism and religious extremism.” SCMP reported that Xi’s statements were an apparent attempt to “rebuff international allegations of human rights abuses.”

According to the State Council website, the government convened a national conference on religious affairs on December 3-4, the first since 2016, that called on clergy, the CCP, and government officials to ensure religious doctrine followed the CCP. At the conference, President Xi said religions in the country had made progress in “enhancing their recognition” of the Chinese nation and culture, along with the CCP and socialism. Xi emphasized the need to “uphold and develop a religious theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, work in line with the Party’s basic policy on religious affairs, and uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation.” Xi urged “full and strict governance of religions.” He told CCP and government officials to train individuals who were “adept at the Marxist view on religion, familiar with religious affairs, and competent to engage in

work related to religious believers.” According to media reports, Xi further emphasized strengthening “the management of online religious affairs,” which critics said implied that religious practitioners would be disciplined for inappropriate online commentary.

The Associated Press reported that on May 18, the host of a program on CGTN, the overseas channel of state broadcaster CCTV, used antisemitic tropes. Speaking in English, Zheng Junfeng said, “Some people believe that U.S. pro-Israeli policy is traceable to the influence of wealthy Jews in the U.S. and the Jewish lobby on U.S. foreign policy makers... Jews dominate finance and internet sectors.” Responding on Twitter, the Israeli embassy in China stated, “We have hoped that the times of the ‘Jews controlling the world’ conspiracy theories were over, unfortunately antisemitism has shown its ugly face again. We are appalled to see blatant antisemitism expressed in an official Chinese media outlet.”

In a June SCIO white paper entitled, “The Communist Party of China and Human Rights Protection – A 100-Year Quest,” the government stated that it protects “normal religious activities” and “does not interfere in the internal affairs of religions.”

On August 13, the outlet *Algemeiner* described as antisemitic a caricature of the U.S. Secretary of State that the state-owned *Xinhua* news agency published alongside *Xinhua’s* article on the Secretary’s July meeting with World Health Organization head Tendros Ghebreyesus. The cartoon depicted the Secretary as a devil with red skin, horns, and a large, elongated nose, holding a report entitled “COVID-19 Origins Tracing.” The American Jewish Committee denounced the cartoon on Twitter, calling it “despicable.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Because the government and individuals closely link religion, culture, and ethnicity, it was difficult to categorize many incidents of societal discrimination as being solely based on religious identity.

Despite labor law provisions against discrimination in hiring based on religious belief, some employers continued to discriminate against religious believers. Religious minorities continued to report employers terminated their employment due to their current or prior religious activities.

In 2020, the *Economist* reported employment discrimination against ethnic minorities was pervasive, citing a study that found that Hui job seekers had to send twice as many applications as Han applicants and that Uyghurs had on average to send nearly four times as many applications just to hear back from potential employers. The study found the gap was greater for highly educated workers, with Uyghur candidates who were in the top 1 percent academically having to send six times as many applications as their Han counterparts. According to the *Economist*, the application gap was “similar in both smaller cities and in the provincial-level regions of Guangdong, Beijing and Shanghai. State-owned enterprises, which have an official mandate to hire more minority workers, appeared at least as biased as other firms.”

Discrimination against potential or current tenants based on their religious beliefs reportedly continued. Since 2017 and 2018, when articles in the 2005 Public Security Administration Punishment Law related to “suspicious activity” began to be enforced in earnest, Falun Gong practitioners reported ongoing difficulty in finding landlords who would rent them apartments. Sources stated government enforcement of this law continued to move the country further away from informal discriminatory practices by individual landlords towards a more formalized enforcement of codified discriminatory legislation.

In June, the *Diplomat* reported growing anti-Muslim sentiment in society as a result of the government’s Sinicization campaign, which the *Diplomat* said could lead to violence. Sources said government propaganda portraying Uyghurs as radicals, extremists, and terrorists had created societal hostility toward that group. Anti-Muslim speech in social media reportedly remained widespread.

There were reports that Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and other religious minorities continued to face difficulties in finding accommodation when they traveled.

In January, media reported messages on social media blamed local Catholics from Shijiazhuang City and “several priests from Europe and the United States” for the spread of COVID-19 in Hebei Province that resulted in a lockdown on January 6. Local priests denounced the posts, saying there had been no religious activities, masses, or meetings since December 24, 2020.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. Secretary of State, Deputy Secretary of State, Charge d’Affaires, and other senior State Department officials and embassy and consulate general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom in the country, including in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang. In July, the Secretary of State met virtually with Uyghur family members, Xinjiang internment camp survivors, and advocates to express the U.S. commitment to calling for the government to end atrocities in Xinjiang. In July, the Deputy Secretary of State met with State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and raised concerns about human rights abuses in the country, including in Hong Kong and Tibet, and the ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity occurring in Xinjiang. During the Secretary of State’s October meeting with Foreign Minister Wang, the Secretary’s spokesperson said the Secretary “raised concerns about a range of actions that undermine the international rules-based order and that run counter to our values and interests and those of our allies and partners, including actions related to human rights, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, the East and South China Seas, and Taiwan.”

Embassy and consulate officials regularly sought meetings with a range of government officials managing religious affairs to obtain more information on government policies and to advocate for greater religious freedom and tolerance. Embassy and consulate officials, including the Charge and Consuls General, urged government officials at the central, provincial, and local levels, including those at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries, to implement stronger protections for religious freedom and to release prisoners of conscience. The Charge highlighted religious freedom in meetings with senior officials. The Department of State, embassy, and consulates general regularly called upon the government to release prisoners of conscience and advocated on behalf of individual cases of persons imprisoned for religious reasons.

PRC authorities consistently harassed and intimidated religious leaders to dissuade them from speaking with U.S. officials. Authorities regularly prevented members of religious communities from attending events at the embassy and consulates general, and security services questioned individuals who did attend. Authorities routinely declined to approve or postponed U.S. officials’ requests to visit religious sites and meet with religious leaders.

The Charge, Consuls General in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan, and other embassy and consulate general officials met with religious groups, as well as academics, NGOs, members of registered and unregistered religious groups, and family members of religious prisoners to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom. Embassy and consulate general officials hosted events around religious holidays and conducted roundtable discussions with religious leaders to convey the importance of religious pluralism in society and learn about issues facing religious communities.

The embassy continued to amplify Department of State religious freedom initiatives directly to local audiences through postings to the embassy website and to its Weibo, WeChat, and Twitter accounts. Over the course of the year, the embassy published nearly 50 messages promoting religious freedom, including videos, statements, images, and infographics. The embassy highlighted the Secretary’s participation in the civil society-led International Religious Freedom Summit in July and his visit to the Vatican in June to emphasize U.S. support for religious freedom. It posted or retweeted posts concerning the state of religious freedom in Xinjiang and Tibet. For example, on International Religious Freedom Day on October 27, the embassy reposted the Secretary’s message supporting respect for religious freedom, as well as information describing the Chinese government’s continuing control over religion and restrictions on the activities of religious adherents. On December 10, the embassy issued a Human Rights Day statement from the Charge on its website and through its international and Chinese social media accounts. The statement highlighted the breadth of gross violations of human rights occurring in the PRC, including restrictions on religious freedom. The embassy also shared greetings from the President and Secretary of State on special religious days for Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Tibetan Buddhists; these were viewed by millions of social media users. In total, embassy posts on social media garnered almost 10 million views and approximately 240,000 engagements.

On January 13, CBP issued a Withhold Release Order that prohibited the import of all cotton and tomato products produced in Xinjiang “based on information that reasonably indicates the use of detainee or prison labor and situations of forced labor.”

On January 19, the then Secretary of State determined that since at least March 2017, the PRC’s repressive actions against Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other religious minority groups in Xinjiang constituted genocide and crimes against humanity.

On March 22, the U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on Wang Junzheng, Secretary of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), and Chen Mingguo, Director of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau (XPSB), pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13818, which builds upon and implements the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, for their connection to serious human rights abuses against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. The U.S. coordinated the timing of the sanctions with the European Union, United Kingdom, and Canada,

which levied their own sanctions against Chinese individuals and entities on the same day. In response, on March 27, the Chinese government sanctioned two officials on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a move the Secretary condemned as “baseless.”

On May 12, the Secretary of State announced visa sanctions against Yu Hui, former office director of the Central Leading Group Preventing and Dealing with Heretical Religions in Chengdu, for his involvement in gross violations of human rights against Falun Gong practitioners.

Also on May 12, the United States cohosted a high-level virtual event on Xinjiang with 17 other countries and six NGOs. Speaking at the event, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations described Uyghurs’ wish “to practice basic freedoms of religion, belief, expression, and movement...” In other multilateral action, the United States joined a group of 44 countries on June 22 in issuing a Canada-led joint statement expressing grave concern about the human rights situation in Xinjiang, as well as deep concern about the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in Tibet. On October 21, it joined a group of 43 countries delivering a joint statement on the human rights situation in Xinjiang at the UN General Assembly Third Committee.

On May 27, the Secretary condemned the PRC’s sanctioning of a former USCIRF commissioner. The Secretary stated, “Beijing’s attempts to intimidate and silence those speaking out for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief, only draw additional international attention and scrutiny to its egregious abuses. This includes the ongoing crimes against humanity and genocide in Xinjiang, as well as its repression of religious and spiritual adherents, including Tibetan Buddhists, Christians, and Falun Gong practitioners.”

Addressing the use of forced labor of ethnic and religious minorities in the polysilicon industry in Xinjiang, on June 24, the CBP issued a Withhold Release Order against Hoshine Silicone Industry Co., Ltd, a company headquartered in Xinjiang. The U.S. Department of Commerce added related Xinjiang-based companies to its list of entities subject to specific license requirements for export, reexport, and/or transfer in-country of specific items (the “Entity List”); the U.S. Department of Labor updated its List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor with related products; and the White House issued a fact sheet on forced labor in Xinjiang.

On July 9, the Bureau of Industry and Security of the U.S. Department of Commerce announced it would add 14 entities to the Entity List for being complicit in China’s campaign of repression, mass detention, and high technology surveillance against Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other members of Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang. The penalties prohibit U.S. companies from selling equipment or other goods to these firms.

On July 13, the U.S. Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce, Homeland Security, Labor, and the U.S. Trade Representative issued an updated Xinjiang Supply Chain Business Advisory that highlighted for businesses with potential supply chain and investment links to Xinjiang the risk of complicity with forced labor and human rights abuses.

On December 6, the Presidential press secretary announced the U.S. would not send diplomatic or official representation to the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympics Games “given the PRC’s ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and other human rights abuses.”

On December 10, the U.S. Department of State imposed visa restrictions on four current and former PRC officials – Shohrat Zakir, Erken Tuniyaz, Hu Lianhe, and Chen Mingguo – for their involvement in gross violations of human rights, specifically arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang. The U.S. Department of the Treasury also designated Shohrat Zakir and Erken Tuniyaz under the Global Magnitsky sanctions program in connection with serious human rights abuse. The Department of the Treasury also imposed financial sanctions on the company SenseTime Group Limited for its involvement in developing facial recognition programs aimed at identifying ethnic Uyghurs. On December 21, in reaction to the December 10 U.S. sanctions, the PRC announced sanctions against four USCIRF officials.

On December 23, the President signed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act “to ensure that goods made with forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the [PRC] do not enter the United States market.” The legislation banned imports of goods made using forced labor of “Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tibetans, and members of other persecuted groups,” including goods mined, produced, or manufactured wholly or in part. The act directed the CBP to presume imports from Xinjiang were produced with forced labor unless the importer proved otherwise to CBP and imposed sanctions on foreign individuals responsible for forced labor in the region.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a CPC under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On November 15, 2021, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following

sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

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