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2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: China — Tibet

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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 it limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities," without defining "normal." CCP regulations allow Chinese citizens to take part only in officially approved religious practices and stipulate religious activity "must not harm national security." CCP regulations control all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including religious venues, groups, personnel, and schools, and prohibit "accepting domination by external forces," which authorities said included Tibetans living outside the country – particularly the Dalai Lama. The State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) issued new regulations, effective May 1, entitled the "Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy," that required all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and created a database of "religious personnel" to track their performance. The SARA also issued new regulations on September 1 that required all religious schools to teach Xi Jinping Thought and adhere to the "Sinicization" of religion. In the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan areas, there were reports of forced disappearances, arrests, torture, physical abuse, and prolonged detentions without trial of monks, nuns, and other individuals due to their religious practices. There were also media reports stating prison authorities routinely sexually abused nuns. There were reports of individuals dying in custody after being beaten. There were reports of individuals who had been released from detention dying as a result of long-term illnesses and injuries suffered following beatings and mistreatment during incarceration. Authorities arrested writers and artists for promoting Tibetan language and culture. Authorities continued to arrest individuals for possessing photographs of, or writings by, the Dalai Lama. The government continued to restrict the size of Buddhist monasteries and other institutions and to implement a campaign begun in 2016 to evict monks and nuns from monasteries and to prohibit them from practicing elsewhere. The CCP continued to promote "Sinicization" policies that aimed to interpret religious ideas in accordance with CCP ideology and to emphasize loyalty to the CCP and the state. The CCP continued to implement the Administrative Measures for Religious Organizations regulations, released in 2020, that further formalized administrative procedures for Sinicizing all religions. Media reported authorities took measures to require Buddhist monasteries to translate texts from Tibetan to Mandarin, in what observers said constituted an ongoing attempt to erase the Tibetan language. On May 21, the government issued a white paper that asserted Tibet had always been part of China and that the PRC would be responsible for the selection of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including the Dalai Lama. Authorities continued to restrict the religious practices of monks, nuns, and laypersons. Travel and other restrictions hindered monastics and laypersons from engaging in traditional religious practices and pilgrimages. Repression, including arbitrary surveillance, increased around politically sensitive events, religious anniversaries, and the Dalai Lama's birthday. The government, citing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, again canceled some religious festivals and limited access to religious sites for Tibetans but allowed Chinese tourists greater access to the same locations. Authorities intensified overt surveillance of monks and nuns and forced former political prisoners to use government-issued mobile phones and wear ankle bracelets containing recording and GPS tracking devices. One nongovernmental organization (NGO), the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), described surveillance methods at monasteries and nunneries, including ubiquitous closed-circuit cameras, police stations adjacent to or on the premises, monitoring monks' and nuns' internet and social media use, and thousands of government workers employed at temples, as being "of dystopian proportions." The government encouraged families to inform on their neighbors, and it attempted to control access to social media. It continued to force monasteries to display portraits of CCP leaders and the national flag and required Tibetans to replace images of the Dalai Lama and other lamas in their homes with portraits of prominent CCP leaders, including Chairman Mao Zedong and General Secretary and PRC President Xi Jinping. PRC authorities continued to restrict children from participating in many traditional religious festivals,

going on pilgrimages during school holidays, or receiving religious education. As part of efforts to Sinicize the population, authorities aggressively promoted Mandarin-language-only instruction. According to a report by the NGO Tibet Action Institute (TAI), the government required nearly 80 percent of Tibetan children to attend government-run boarding schools, where they were separated from their families, suffering emotional and psychological harm, and were at risk of losing connection to their language and culture. Authorities continued to engage in widespread interference in monastic practices, including by appointing government and CCP personnel and government-approved monks to manage religious institutions. The government continued to control the selection of Tibetan Buddhist lamas and supervised their religious and political education. It continued to force monks and nuns to undergo political training in state ideology. Religious leaders and government employees were often required to denounce the Dalai Lama and express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu. Officials routinely made public statements denigrating the Dalai Lama and promoting the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism. President Xi visited the TAR on July 21-22, where he urged Tibetans to “follow the party.” Authorities continued in state media to justify interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating the monasteries with “separatism” and pro-independence activities.

Some Tibetans continued to encounter societal discrimination when seeking employment, engaging in business, and traveling for pilgrimage, according to multiple sources.

The PRC continued to tightly restrict diplomatic access to the TAR and to deny U.S. embassy in Beijing’s requests to visit the area. No U.S. diplomats were allowed to visit the TAR during the year. U.S. officials repeatedly raised concerns about religious freedom in Tibet with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels. U.S. officials, including the Secretary of State, U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, who was appointed in December, Charge d’Affaires, and other embassy officers continued sustained and concerted efforts to advocate for the rights of Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions and language without interference from the government. U.S. officials underscored that decisions on the succession of the Dalai Lama should be made solely by the Tibetan people, free from interference, and they raised concerns about the continued disappearance of Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, missing since 1995. During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Tibet, including continuing visa restrictions on PRC government and CCP officials that it had determined to be “substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan areas,” pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018. In July, the U.S. Secretary of State met with Central Tibetan Administration representative Ngodup Dongchung in New Delhi. In April, the Department of State spokesperson said, “We respect Tibetans’ right to select, educate, and venerate their own leaders, like the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, according to their own beliefs, and without government interference.” The embassy and consulates used social media to deliver direct messaging about religious freedom in Tibet to millions of Chinese citizens.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to official data from the 2020 estimate of the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the total population of the TAR is approximately 3,648,000, of which Tibetans make up approximately 90 percent. Han Chinese make up approximately 8 percent. Other ethnicities comprise the remainder. Some experts, however, believe the number of Han Chinese and other non-Tibetans living there is significantly underreported. The majority of ethnic Tibetans in the PRC live in the TAR, in Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs), and in counties in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces. Official census data show Tibetans constitute approximately 24.4 percent of the total population in Qinghai Province, 2.1 percent in Sichuan Province, 1.8 percent in Gansu Province, and 0.3 percent in Yunnan Province, although the percentage of Tibetans is much higher within prefectures and counties of these provinces designated as autonomous for Tibetans.

Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practices Bon, a pre-Buddhist indigenous religion. Small minorities practice Islam, Catholicism, or Protestantism. Some scholars estimate there are as many as 400,000 Bon followers across the Tibetan Plateau, most of whom also follow the Dalai Lama and consider themselves to be Tibetan Buddhists. Scholars estimate there are up to 5,000 Tibetan Muslims and 700 Tibetan Catholics in the TAR. Other residents of traditionally Tibetan areas include Han Chinese, many of whom practice Buddhism (including Tibetan Buddhism), Taoism, Confucianism, or traditional folk religions, or profess atheism, as well as Hui Muslims and non-Tibetan Catholics and Protestants.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The PRC constitution, which cites the leadership of the CCP and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping Thought, states that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief,” but it limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities,” without defining “normal.” The constitution bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion. It says religion may not be used to disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system. The constitution states religious bodies and affairs are not to be “subject to any foreign control.” 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 legally hold worship services or other religious ceremonies and activities.

CCP regulations regarding religion are issued by the CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD). The UFWD’s Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Work manages religious affairs through the SARA.

The UFWD controls the selection of Tibetan religious leaders, including lamas. Regulations stipulate that, depending on the perceived geographic area of influence of the lama, relevant administrative entities may deny permission for a lama to be recognized as reincarnated (a tenet of Tibetan Buddhism), and that these administrative entities must approve reincarnations. The UFWD claims the right to deny recognition of reincarnations of high lamas of “especially great influence.” The regulations also state no foreign organization or individual may interfere in the selection of reincarnate lamas, and all reincarnate lamas must be reborn within China. The CCP maintains a registry of officially recognized reincarnate lamas.

Regulations issued by the UFWD allow Chinese citizens to take part only in officially approved religious practices; these regulations assert CCP control over all aspects of religions, including religious venues, groups, personnel, and schools. Through local regulations issued under the framework of the national-level Management Regulation of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries, governments of the TAR and other autonomous Tibetan areas control the registration of monasteries, nunneries, and other Tibetan Buddhist religious centers. The regulations also give the CCP formal control over building and managing religious structures and require monasteries to obtain official permission to hold large-scale religious events or gatherings.

The central government’s Regulations on Religious Affairs require religious groups to register with the government, impose fines on landlords who provide facilities for unauthorized religious activities, and restrict contact with overseas religious institutions. The regulations require religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad and prohibit “accepting domination by external forces,” which authorities say include Tibetans living outside the country, particularly the Dalai Lama. The regulations submit religious schools to the same oversight as places of worship and impose restrictions on religious groups conducting business or investments, including placing limits on the amount of donations they may receive, thereby constraining property ownership and development. 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.

The regulations also require that religious activity “must not harm national security.” While the regulations stipulate that religious groups must abide by the law, safeguard national unity, and respond to “religious extremism,” the term “extremism” is undefined. Measures to safeguard unity and respond to “religious extremism” include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions, and recommending penalties such as suspending groups and canceling clergy credentials. The regulations stipulate that the online activities of religious groups must be approved by the provincial UFWD.

On January 1, the “Regulations on Counter-espionage Security of the Tibet Autonomous Region” came into force. According to the regulations, “counter-espionage” in the TAR includes activities such as “ethnic separatism,” “ethnic conflict,” and “using religion to endanger national security.”

On January 18, the SARA issued new regulations, effective May 1, entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” that require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and that 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, that 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 religious organizations and institutions will be held responsible for the behaviors 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 SARA also issued new regulations on September 1 requiring all religious schools to teach Xi Jinping Thought and adhere to the “Sinicization of religion.” The 2020 “Guidelines for National Security in Universities, Primary, and Secondary Schools” require school curriculums to ensure students “adhere to the correct path” by “strengthening the party’s leadership, enhancing political ideology, and practicing core socialist values.”

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. Enforcement and implementation of these rules vary widely across and within regions. 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. These regulations have effectively barred Tibetan youth from entering monasteries prior to reaching 18 years of age.

In January 2020, the government adopted the “Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region.” These require “equal opportunities” for non-Tibetan ethnic groups at all levels of government and in schools, private business companies, religious centers, and the military in the TAR.

A government policy introduced in 2018 requires Tibetan monks and nuns to undergo political training in CCP ideology. Monks and nuns must not only demonstrate competence in religious studies, but must also show “political reliability,” “moral integrity capable of impressing the public,” and a willingness to “play an active role at critical moments.”

Self-immolation (setting oneself on fire as a form of protest) is considered homicide, and family members, teachers, and religious leaders may be charged as accessories to homicide if a relative, pupil, or follower chooses to self-immolate.

To establish formal places of worship, religious organizations must receive approval from the local UFWD, both when the facility is proposed and again prior to the first time any services are 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 an established facility or worship meeting space; they must seek a separate approval from CCP authorities each time they want to reserve a space for worship, such as by renting a hotel or an apartment. Worshipping in a space without prior approval, either through the formal registration process or by seeking an approval for each service, is considered an illegal religious activity that may be criminally or administratively punished.

Individuals must apply to the TAR CCP Committee to take up religious orders, and the committee may deny any application. Regulations also require monks and nuns to obtain permission from officials in both the originating and receiving counties before traveling to other prefectures or to county-level cities within the TAR to “practice their religion,” engage in religious activities, study, or teach. TAPs outside the TAR have similar regulations.

At the central level, the CCP Central Committee’s Central Tibet Work Coordination Group and the UFWD are responsible for developing and implementing religious management policies, which are carried out with support from the five state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations: The Three-Self Patriotic Movement (Protestant), the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, and the Buddhist Association of China (BAC). At local levels, party leaders and branches of the UFWD, SARA, and BAC are required to coordinate implementation of religious policies in monasteries.

CCP members and retired government officials, including Tibetans, are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. CCP members who are found to belong to religious organizations are subject to various types of punishment, including termination of their employment and expulsion from the CCP.

Government Practices

Human rights and media reported authorities exercised strict control over telephone and online communications in Tibetan areas. As a result, some disappearances, arrests, detentions, and deaths that occurred in prior years only became known during the year. Limited access to information, as well as travel restrictions, due both to government policies limiting access to Tibetan areas and to

the COVID-19 pandemic, made it difficult to ascertain the exact number of individuals imprisoned because of their religious beliefs or affiliation, determine the charges brought against them, or assess the extent and severity of abuses they suffered. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize some incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

The *Taiwan Times* reported authorities in “reeducation camps” starved women with substandard meals, and some died of malnutrition. One survivor, Adhi, said she obtained extra food by providing “sexual favors” demanded by the Han Chinese bureaucrats overseeing the detention center.

The India-based NGO Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) reported that in September 2019, authorities detained Norsang, a resident of Tachu Township in Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu) Prefecture, TAR, for refusing to participate in “patriotic education” during the run-up to the 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. TCHRD later reported, “In May 2021, it was learned that Norsang had died in custody a week after his detention in 2019.” A source told TCHRD that Norsang died as a result of authorities’ severely beating and torturing him.

The NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported in January that Tibetan monk Tenzin Nyima, after his release from custody in October 2020, died in late December 2020 or early January 2021 from injuries sustained while in custody. HRW said Nyima, from Dza Wonpo Monastery in Dza Wonpo Township, Kardze (Ganzi) TAP, Sichuan Province was initially arrested in November 2019 for distributing pamphlets and shouting slogans calling for Tibetan independence. Authorities released him in May 2020 but rearrested him in August for posting news of his initial arrest online. Sources told HRW that when he was released the second time, Nyima was unable to speak or move and suffered from an acute respiratory infection, which they believed was due to beatings, severe malnourishment, and mistreatment while in custody.

The India-based Tibetan media outlet *Phayul* reported in May that Norsang (no last name), a man held incommunicado after his 2019 detention for refusing to participate in government-led political reeducation training, was allegedly tortured to death. According to *Phayul*, Norsang died in 2019 while in the custody of local security officials, who did not reveal his death until May. Authorities said Norsang committed suicide to escape debts, but a source stated he was not in debt at the time of his arrest.

There were no reported cases of Tibetans self-immolating during the year as a means of protesting against government policies, compared with no individuals in 2020 and one in 2019. In January, the Central Tibetan Administration reported one case of self-immolation that occurred in 2015 but was previously unreported. The man, Shurmo, was 26 when he self-immolated on September 17, 2015, in Shagchukha Village, Driru County, Nagchu Prefecture, TAR. According to ICT, from 2009 to December 2019, 157 Tibetans set themselves on fire in protest against what they said was the occupation of Tibet and abuses of Tibetans’ religion and culture under PRC rule. Experts and local sources attributed the decrease in the number of self-immolations to tighter control measures by authorities and the fear that family members and associates of self-immolators might be punished, including by being charged as accessories to homicide.

The whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, recognized as the 11th Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama and most Tibetan Buddhists, remained unknown since his 1995 forced disappearance by Chinese authorities. Nyima was six years old at the time he and his family were reportedly abducted. The Panchen Lama is considered by the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism to be the second-most-prominent leader after the Dalai Lama. On April 25, the Tibetan diaspora marked the occasion of Nyima’s 32nd birthday. Advocacy groups called on the government to release him and allow him to resume his religious duties.

Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported in August that according to TCHRD, at least 40 enforced disappearances had occurred in Tibetan areas over the prior three years. Victims included Buddhist clergy, writers, artists, farmers, community leaders, students, and other intellectuals. TCHRD stated the majority of those disappeared were described by authorities as suspects in cases of “endangering state security” or “disclosing state secrets.” According to TCHRD, “Tibetans continue to disappear every year, crippling family life and community cohesion.” Pema Gyal, a researcher at the London-based rights group Tibet Watch, told RFA’s Tibetan Service, “There are so many Tibetans who are arrested by the Chinese government, yet their whereabouts and the reasons for their arrests remain unknown for a very long time.”

RFA reported that on March 23, the family of monk Rinchen Tsultrim learned that authorities had sentenced him to four and a half years in prison after a closed trial at which he was denied access to an attorney. Authorities arrested Tsultrim in 2019 on suspicion of working to “split the country” and held him incommunicado for two years. His sister told RFA that prior to his arrest, authorities warned Tsultrim to stop expressing his thoughts and writing on a range of Tibetan political, social, and cultural issues. At year’s end, Tsultrim was being held in Mianyang Prison in Sichuan Province.

Sources reported that the whereabouts of several monks remained unknown at year's end. These included Dorje Rabten, who in September 2018 protested against government policies restricting young people from becoming monks; Tenzin Gelek, who had protested Dorje's detention; Lobsang Thamke, who was arrested in 2018 and sentenced on July 30, 2021, to four years in prison on unknown charges; Lobsang Dorje, who was arrested in August 2018; and Thubpa, whom police took from the Trotsik Monastery in Ngaba (Aba) County, Sichuan Province, toward the end of 2017.

Sources told media that authorities routinely physically abused Tibetan prisoners. RFA reported in September that authorities released Tibetan Monk Thabgey Gyatso after he served 12 years of his 15-year sentence for participating in protests in Lhasa in 2008. Sources told RFA that "due to harsh treatment in the prison, his vision and overall health have become very weak." For the first year following his arrest, his whereabouts were unknown.

In February, the *Taiwan Times* reported prison staff in "reeducation camps" routinely tortured women, including nuns, by beating them and shocked them with cattle prods. Rinzen Kunsang, a Tibetan woman who was arrested for taking part in a demonstration, reported being handcuffed, stripped, prodded with electric batons, and beaten with bamboo sticks, often until the sticks broke. Other Tibetan women reported guards hung them on the wall, sometimes upside down, and hit them with electric batons. According to the *Taiwan Times*, Ngawang Tsepak, a nun, was taken down only after both her shoulders became dislocated. Ngawang Jhampa, another nun, reported that she was beaten with chairs and sticks and shocked with electric cattle prods. Several survivors said the guards set dogs on the prisoners. Gyaltsen Chodon, a nun, reported that guards tread on their hands with iron-tipped boots; kicked them in the face and stomach; placed buckets full of urine and feces on their heads and struck the buckets with sticks; kicked them in the breasts and genitals until they were bleeding; and burned them with lighted cigarettes.

According to the *Taiwan Times* report, prison authorities routinely sexually degraded nuns and raped them. One source said nuns were told their bodies "belonged to the CCP" rather than to the monasteries, commenting that these were not merely acts of violence, because once raped, a nun would consider herself to have broken the vows of celibacy and feel unworthy of continuing as a nun, leaving her no option but to lead a secular life. One nun said guards forced the nuns to come out naked and prostrate themselves in front of the monks. One survivor reported guards tying electric cords around her breasts and shocking her, while another reported guards setting dogs on the women while they were naked.

The *Taiwan Times* reported that in a prison in Lhasa, authorities raped 25 women after they wore Tibetan attire rather than their prison uniforms to celebrate the Tibetan New Year.

Sources told RFA that authorities sometimes released prisoners in failing health prior to the end of their sentences. RFA reported in March that Gangbu Rikgye Nyima, serving a 10-year sentence for participation in protests, was released in February, a year early. According to RFA, the release came about because Gangbu's health had deteriorated badly due to her being beaten and otherwise physically abused in prison.

Voice of America (VOA) reported that on February 17, authorities detained three teenagers for creating a WeChat group called "White Rocky Mountain Club," a reference to a local Tibetan Buddhist deity. According to VOA, the youths organized the chat group to celebrate the Tibetan New Year from February 12 to 14, but authorities stated the group had violated government rules requiring all WeChat groups to register with local regulatory authorities so the government could monitor chat content. VOA reported police badly beat the three boys, causing one to suffer a broken leg, requiring hospitalization.

According to HRW, Kunchok Jinpa, a tour guide and environmental activist, died in a hospital in Lhasa on February 6, less than three months after being transferred there from prison without his family's knowledge. Local sources said he had suffered a brain hemorrhage and was paralyzed. Authorities arrested Jinpa in 2013 for allegedly passing information to foreign media about local environmental and other protests in his region and sentenced him to 21 years in prison for leaking "state secrets." Prior to his death, his family had no news of Kunchok Jinpa's whereabouts since his detention in 2013. The HRW China director stated, "Kunchok Jinpa's death is yet another grim case of a wrongfully imprisoned Tibetan dying from mistreatment. Chinese authorities responsible for arbitrary detention, torture or ill-treatment, and the death of people in their custody should be held accountable."

TCHRD released a political prisoner database in December that documented that authorities had detained 5,500 Tibetan political prisoners since 1990. VOA reported that authorities had released more than 3,000 of those but continued to hold more than 1,800 at year's end.

RFA reported in March that the government conducted a wave of arrests in Lhasa and along Tibet's border with India. Names of those arrested were not reported, but RFA indicated the arrests occurred ahead of a month of politically sensitive anniversaries beginning in March, including the

March 10 anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule.

In April, RFA reported officials in Sichuan Province arrested Go Sherab Gyatso, a monk at Kirti Monastery in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, and a well-known Tibetan educator and writer, although at the time his whereabouts were unknown. The NGO TibetWatch reported in December that authorities secretly sentenced Go Sherab Gyatso in November to 10 years in prison for “inciting secession.” According to TibetWatch sources, local authorities did not reveal the exact date of his sentencing or where he would serve his sentence. Authorities had detained Gyatso twice before, from 1998 to 2002 for possessing a portrait of the Dalai Lama and from 2008 to 2009 for unspecified reasons. RFA reported he was well known for his writings in support of the Dalai Lama. In July, four UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, wrote the government about “the alleged arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of two Tibetan Buddhists, Mr. Go Sherab Gyatso and Mr. Rinchen Tsultrim.” A government letter in response from September confirmed the detentions.

RFA reported in April that authorities arrested six Tibetan writers, monks, and former political prisoners between March and April in Sichuan Province. Sources told RFA that authorities in Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, arrested Gangkye Drubpa Kyab, Sey Nam, Gangbu Yudrum, and Gang Tsering Dolma, as well as two other unknown individuals, between February and March, but that due to the PRC’s “blockade” of information, no information was available about the charges or the whereabouts of the individuals. No more information regarding their arrest or detention came to light by year’s end.

In April, Tibet.net, a website run by the Central Tibetan Administration, a representative civil support organization based in Dharamsala, India, reported the arrest of several Tibetans living in Driru County, Nagchu Prefecture, TAR, who were suspected of contacting Tibetans abroad via telephone and social media. The report identified Gyajin as one of those detained but was unable to identify the other individuals. According to the NGO Free Tibet, Driru County is one of the most severely and militarily controlled areas in the TAR, dating back to May 2013, when residents staged a protest against government-affiliated companies that had begun extraction activities on their sacred mountain, Naglha Zamba.

TibetWatch reported that in July, authorities shut down a private Tibetan-language school in Golog (Guoluo) TAP, Qinghai Province, without citing a reason, and in August, they arrested Rinchen Kyi, one of its longest-serving teachers. Authorities charged Kyi with inciting separatism. Sources from the area said the school’s closure was politically motivated because its primary language of instruction was Tibetan and it provided Tibetan culture-based learning for its students.

Human rights groups reported PRC authorities continued to criminalize the sharing or possession of photos of, or statements by, the Dalai Lama. RFA reported in August that authorities in Dza Wonpo Township, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, raided homes and arrested 19 monks and 40 laypersons for possessing photographs of the Dalai Lama. Police called a mandatory meeting three days later for local residents aged 18 and older. A source said, “The focus of the meeting was to warn people not to keep any pictures of the Dalai Lama or to share any information over their cell phones.” Police then searched homes in the township looking for banned photographs. Authorities also inspected a local old age home on the pretext of cleaning the facility, confiscated a number of banned photographs, and gave residents pictures of President Xi and other Chinese leaders to put up in their place. The meeting and raids followed meetings earlier in the year in Dza Wonpo in which authorities forced Tibetans to sign a document pledging not to keep or circulate photographs of the Dalai Lama, on penalty of criminal prosecution and denial of state aid, according to sources. Tibet.net also reported the event, saying authorities detained 121 Tibetans in Dza Wonpo for approximately one month and forced them to undergo political “reeducation.” The monks were arrested after participating in informal Tibetan-language classes and language preservation groups on social media. According to the report, authorities subsequently released all but three individuals.

According to Free Tibet and *Phayul*, in late October, authorities sentenced former monk and writer Thupten Lobsang Lhundup (known by his pen name Dhi Lhaden) to four years in prison for “disrupting social order.” Authorities detained Lhaden in June 2019 in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, and held him incommunicado until his trial. A former monk in Drepung and Sera monasteries in Lhasa, Lhundup authored books and essays criticizing government policies. According to TCHRD, prosecutors used his book, “The Art of Passive Resistance,” as evidence against him. TCHRD stated the “charge of ‘disrupting social order’ is a catchall term employed by the party-state to silence dissent and preserve the culture of censorship.”

Free Tibet reported that on March 14, local police in Dzato County, Qinghai Province, detained and interrogated four Tibetans for climbing a mountain to pray and burn incense. In addition, police confiscated their identity cards and checked their phones to see whether their WeChat accounts were registered with the government as required. Police arrested one of the men. They warned the parents and relatives of the four men that they would be held responsible if a similar incident occurred.

RFA reported in December that authorities in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, sentenced Tibetan monk Lobsang Thinley to five years in prison for “spreading books and lectures” of the Dalai Lama. According to the report, authorities arrested Lobsang in July for distributing information about the Dalai Lama, although they did not inform his family that he had been arrested or sentenced until September. Sources told RFA that authorities denied him access to legal counsel. According to sources, Lobsang had been detained previously for similar reasons.

A July report by HRW stated authorities in 2019 raided Tengdro Monastery, Shekar town, Tingri County, TAR, beat several monks and villagers, and detained approximately 20 individuals. According to HRW, the monks were held on suspicion of having exchanged messages with Tibetans abroad, contributing to earthquake relief money sent to Tibetans at their sister monastery in Nepal following a 2015 earthquake in that country, and possessing photographs or literature related to the Dalai Lama. The report said that following a secret trial, four monks received “extraordinarily harsh sentences” ranging from five to 20 years.

According to multiple sources, authorities often forced political prisoners, particularly monks and nuns, to perform patriotic songs and dances praising the CCP, and to watch propaganda films. If participants seemed uninterested, authorities considered it evidence of disloyalty to the state and subjected them to severe punishment, including beatings, and refused them permission to receive gifts of food or clothing from visiting family members.

Media and human rights groups reported local officials in Tibetan areas explicitly stated supporters of the Dalai Lama and other religious leaders could be arrested under the government’s nationwide anti-organized crime program and that Tibetans were told to inform on anyone who “links up with the Dalai clique.”

The government continued to place restrictions on the size of Buddhist monasteries and other institutions and to implement a campaign begun in 2016 to evict monks and nuns from monasteries. While exact numbers were difficult to ascertain, human rights groups and local sources said that between 2016 and 2019 (the most recent information available), authorities evicted between 6,000 and 17,000 Tibetan and Han Chinese monks and nuns from Larung Gar and Yachen Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institutes, both in Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province. According to local sources, authorities continued to prohibit monks or nuns from returning to these locations and rebuilding these sites. Monastics expelled from Larung Gar and Yachen Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institutes were specifically prohibited from transferring to other monasteries to continue their religious education.

RFA reported in August that authorities shut down Hongcheng Tibetan Monastery in Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, and evicted an unknown number of nuns and monks. According to RFA, videos of the incident showed monks at Hongcheng Monastery, also known as Yulingta Monastery, holding up banners that read “Forcible defrocking of monks is illegal and unacceptable!” and other protest slogans. RFA reported videos showed nuns “wailed in mourning” at being made to leave, while others shouted “Stop this! Stop this!” and “Film everything!” Local officials denied the operation had occurred. One foreign-based commentator told RFA the government was “getting ready to eliminate all Tibetan temples and monasteries within the majority Han Chinese area of China.”

During the year, the government reportedly continued its policy of resettling previously nomadic Tibetans in government-subsidized housing units. In many areas, these were located near township and county government seats or along major roads that had no nearby monasteries where resettled villagers could worship. The government prohibited construction of new religious sites in these areas without prior approval. Traditionally, Tibetan villages were clustered around monasteries, which provided religious and other services to members of the community. Many Tibetans continued to view these relocation measures as CCP and government efforts to dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and communities.

Free Tibet reported that on October 21-22, security officials forcibly expelled 30 teenage student monks from Jakyung Monastery and 50 teenage student monks from Deetsa Monastery in Hualong Hui Autonomous County, Qinghai Province, on the grounds that individuals younger than 18 were not permitted to enroll in monasteries. They took the youths home and informed them they could no longer wear monks’ robes or study at the monasteries. Free Tibet stated, “Such a directive limits young Tibetan Buddhists’ access to their cultural heritage, as monasteries serve as an essential resource for Tibetan language and cultural learning... Furthermore, students are a vital part of a monastery’s structure; providing senior monks assistance in their duties to ensure smoother operation of the monastery[.]”

International media and NGOs reported the government continued carrying out its 2019-2023 five-year plan to Sinicize Buddhism in China by emphasizing loyalty to the CCP and the state. The plan included Tibetan Buddhism, with the involvement of the state-run BAC. The CCP’s Administrative Measures for Religious Organizations, promulgated in 2020, further formalized administrative

procedures for Sinicizing all religions, including Tibetan Buddhism, to “follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics” and “correctly handle the relationship between national law and canon[.]”

The Catholic news outlet *AsiaNews* reported that new SARA regulations entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” which took effect on May 1, placed more ideological controls over the training, selection, and monitoring of clergy, including emphasizing allegiance to the CCP and socialism. On February 11, *Bitter Winter*, an online publication that tracks religious liberty and human rights abuses in the country, 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 the database 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, including the BAC. *Bitter Winter* stated individuals had to prove they “support[ed] the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and support[ed] the socialist system.” According to *AsiaNews*, under the regulations, “Living buddhas...will not be able to exercise any ministry, nor will they be considered true reincarnations without the permission of the [CCP].” *Bitter Winter* stated the regulations created “an Orwellian system of surveillance, and strengthen[ed] the already strict control on all clergy.”

Associated Press (AP) reported that in June, President Xi visited Lhasa to mark the 70th anniversary of PRC control over Tibet, the first time he had visited Tibet in more than a decade. AP reported that during the visit, one sign on public display read, “Xi Jinping’s new socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics is the guide for the whole party and all nationalities to fight for the great rejuvenation of China.” At Jokhang Temple, considered the most sacred temple in Tibet and one of the holiest sites in Tibetan Buddhism, head monk Lhakpa said the Dalai Lama was not its spiritual leader. Asked who was, he said, “Xi Jinping.”

RFA reported on a conference for more than 500 monks and nuns held at the Tso-Ngon Buddhist University in Xining City, Qinghai Province, September 27 to 30. Attendees, including religious figures and students from Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist universities, were instructed that Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and study centers must begin to translate classroom texts from Tibetan into Mandarin. RFA stated this new policy was designed to encourage the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism and to further enforce the government’s effort to promote Mandarin as the national language. According to RFA, it was unclear if the policy would also include the gradual translation into Chinese of the thousands of classical Buddhist scriptures also written in Tibetan, many of which were originally translated from Sanskrit. Geshe Lhakdor, director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India, said Mandarin was not able to communicate the full range of meaning of Buddhist doctrine. He said, “There is no good intention behind this plan.” In an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* in November, a Tibetan academic based in the United States wrote, “The ultimate goal is for future lamas and monks to learn Buddhism only in Mandarin – paving the way for the erasure of the Tibetan language.”

On May 21, the PRC government issued a white paper that asserted Tibet had always been part of China and that the PRC would be responsible for the selection of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including the Dalai Lama. The government stated it shall be in control of important Tibetan Buddhist traditions, including the right to select which lamas would be “authorized” to reincarnate, and will ensure that reincarnation of living buddhas “has been carried out in an orderly manner in accordance with laws, regulations, religious rituals, and historical conventions.” In addition, the paper stated Tibetan Buddhism would be required to conform to the CCP and socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The TAR government reportedly continued to maintain tight control over the use of Tibetan Buddhist religious relics and declared them, religious buildings, and religious institutions to be state property. Sources continued to report that while authorities permitted some traditional religious ceremonies and practices, they continued to exercise control over the activities of religious leaders and religious gatherings of laypersons, confining many such activities to officially designated places of worship and preventing monks from traveling to villages for politically sensitive events and religious ceremonies. Religious figures and laypersons frequently reported difficulty traveling to monasteries outside their home regions, both within the TAR and in other parts of the country. Travelers said they encountered roadblocks and police checkpoints surrounding major monasteries, with security personnel often checking their identity cards and refusing entry to nonresidents. Tibetans wishing to visit family members residing in monasteries noted frequent refusals or limits on their ability to visit. Local sources reported similar restrictions on their movements and said checkpoints and fear of detention prevented them from visiting monasteries and participating in religious events. Many monks expelled from their monasteries after 2008 protests in Lhasa and other areas, such as Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, had not returned, some because of government prohibitions.

Free Tibet reported in July that the CCP launched a “Party History” campaign across China in February in anticipation of the CCP’s 100-year anniversary in July. As part of the campaign, the CCP sent party cadres to visit homes, monasteries, and schools across Tibet to spread “correct” party

history and policies. In Yulshul (Yushu) TAP, Qinghai Province, party officials and police visited families and public schools to spread party propaganda. In May, party officials held a series of propaganda events at Dorje Drak Monastery Gongkar (Gongga) County, TAR. Monks and nuns were required to write their names on a banner that said, “Good monks and nuns who appreciate the favor of the party, listen to the party, follow the party.” In late June, CCP officials held propaganda events at monasteries in Lhasa, Chamdo, and Nagchu Prefectures, TAR, to mark the 100th anniversary of the CCP and the 70th anniversary of PRC control over Tibet.

According to sources, authorities continued to restrict many major monasteries across the Tibetan Plateau from holding large-scale religious events, citing COVID-19 concerns. Local sources confirmed to Free Tibet that many Tibetan monasteries and other religious sites were closed during the year, with the authorities saying the closures were COVID-19 precautions. Free Tibet reported that in January, citing COVID-19 concerns, the government issued a directive forbidding all “outsiders” from entering all areas of Larung Gar (former home to the Tibetan Buddhist Institute, which authorities had destroyed) and banning large-scale gatherings and religious activities there. Many of these sources said officials were using pandemic restrictions to prevent individuals from participating in religious activities.

RFA reported that authorities cancelled public religious festivals and prayer ceremonies for Losar (the Tibetan New Year) in February and closed major religious sites in Lhasa, including the Potala Palace and Drepung and Sera monasteries, citing COVID-19 restrictions. Local sources said Tibetans were also barred from holding social gatherings and visiting monasteries and temples in Nyagrong (Xinlong) County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, and authorities restricted travel in Tibetan-populated areas in Qinghai Province ahead of the start of Losar. A source told RFA that in advance of Losar, authorities imposed a 10:00 p.m. curfew in Golog (Guoluo) and Matoe (Maduo) Counties in Golog TAP, Qinghai Province in the name of “social stability” and “sanitation.” According to the source, security personnel were dispatched to restaurants, hotels, internet cafes, and “all places of recreation.” Police checked identification cards. The source said, “Anyone caught out after curfew risks punishment, including imprisonment and severe physical abuse.”

Local sources said the government continued to suppress religious activities it viewed as vehicles for political dissent. There were reports that local authorities again ordered many monasteries and laypersons not to celebrate or organize any public gatherings to celebrate the Dalai Lama’s 86th birthday on July 6, or to commemorate the anniversary of the March 10, 1959, Tibetan uprising or a March 14, 2008, outbreak of unrest across the Tibetan Plateau. As in prior years, TAR authorities banned monks and nuns from leaving their monasteries and nunneries during such times, and pilgrimage sites were heavily policed. Local sources reported that officials visited monasteries in the TAR and in Sichuan, Qinghai, and Gansu Provinces and warned staff not to host “outside visitors” on the Dalai Lama’s birthday. Sources stated officials continued to urge Tibetans to report on foreign visitors to these areas and other “suspicious activities,” a policy that has been place for many years.

According to Tibet Watch, the government banned all religious activities, social events, and private gatherings in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, to celebrate the 80th birthday on August 8 of the 11th Kirti Rinpoche, Lobsang Tenzin Jigme Yeshe Gyamtso Rinpoche of Kirti Monastery, who is currently living in India. The ban included Kirti Monastery and its associated monasteries in Ngaba and villages in the neighboring area of Zoege. Sources told Tibet Watch authorities imposed special restrictions on social media.

ICT reported that in April, the CCP circulated a new six-point code of conduct for CCP members in the TAR that explicitly forbade party members from all forms of religiosity in public and private life, despite reports that many local government officials held religious beliefs. ICT stated the code of conduct was “significant for being perhaps the first party regulation that clearly and comprehensively details the specific types of religiosity forbidden for party members in the TAR,” including wearing rosary beads or religious imagery, forwarding or “liking” religious materials online, and circumambulating mountains and lakes. The code of conduct also required CCP members to actively promote the party’s antireligion stance among their relatives, refrain from setting up altars or hang religious imagery in homes, and seek party approval before inviting religious personnel to conduct rituals for customary occasions such as weddings and funerals. The TAR regional government punished CCP members who made pilgrimages to India or sent their children to study with Tibetans living abroad.

In May, media outlet *Phayul* reported authorities continued to ban Tibetans and civil servants from participating in religious events during Saga Dawa, the month-long festival that marks the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death. Sources said authorities threatened there would be “serious consequences” for individuals who defied the ban. Authorities intensified surveillance of, and restrictions on, access to the Jokhang Temple complex on the 15th day of Saga Dawa, the holiest day of the month.

According to local sources, police maintained heavy security during the Shoton festival, held August 6 to 14 in Lhasa. There were large numbers of uniformed and plainclothes police monitoring crowds of worshippers. Officials delivered speeches at the festival denouncing the Dalai Lama and urging attendees to be loyal to the CCP.

In October, the U.S.-based news outlet *The Hill* reported that authorities continued to block or otherwise prevent Tibetans from accessing Jokhang Temple in Lhasa in order to expand access for Han Chinese tourists. RFA reported that beginning on May 18, authorities allowed worshippers to enter the temple from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., while tourists, coming mainly from other parts of the country, could visit from 12:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. RFA reported on October 25 that authorities cited COVID-19 protocols to severely restrict government employees, students, retired state workers, and pilgrims from accessing Potala Palace (the former residence of the Dalai Lama) but allowed Han Chinese tourists to visit if they showed proof of negative COVID-19 test results.

In August, the government again banned the annual Dechen Shedrub prayer festival at the site of the former Larung Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institute from occurring. Authorities cited overcrowding and COVID-19 concerns as reasons for the ban. The ban marked the sixth consecutive year the government prohibited the 23-year-old festival from taking place.

According to local sources, Sichuan, Qinghai, and Gansu provincial authorities again warned major monasteries in Tibetan areas, including Labrang, Amchok, and Bora Monasteries, that those holding special events or celebrations would face unspecified “severe consequences.”

Local authorities continued to invoke regulations concerning safeguarding national unity and responding to “religious extremism” in order to monitor individuals, groups, and institutions, and to punish adherents of religious leaders, such as the Dalai Lama. In March, ICT released a report entitled *Party Above Buddhism: China’s Surveillance and Control of Tibetan Monasteries and Nunneries*. ICT stated the surveillance and control of the monastic community was carried out through a sophisticated network of both human and electronic means. According to the report, “The methods deployed on the monastic community are of dystopian proportions and aim at its political neutralization. Not only are physical activities surveilled and controlled, but the institutional method attempts also to stifle the inner world of the monastic community through ideological control.” The report stated, “The intensive surveillance and control of the monastic community has led to either the expulsion of monks for not complying with the official policies, or to their voluntary departure due to constant harassment by officials creating an unbearably suffocating environment for them.”

Sources reported party leaders and branches of the UFWD, SARA, and the state-sanctioned BAC continued to station party and government officials, including security agents, in monasteries in Tibetan areas. Provincial, prefectural, county, and local governments continued to establish police stations or security offices adjacent to or on the premises of many monasteries and nunneries. While no updated statistics were available, sources estimated that in 2018, more than 15,000 government employees were working in approximately 3,000 Tibetan monasteries.

According to human rights groups and local sources, authorities continued to install overt camera surveillance systems at monasteries. The ICT report *Party Above Buddhism* stated CCTV cameras were “massively deployed for surveillance of the monasteries within and outside their vicinities. It is the single largest convenient tool used by law enforcement agencies to maintain surveillance of the monastic community, retain a cumulative record, and proactively crush any hint of dissent... The presence of ever-watching cameras within the monasteries produces a suffocating environment for the monastic community.” The report contained a photograph of the surveillance control room at Kirti Monastery in Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan Province, showing monitors linked to 35 separate cameras surrounding the monastery. RFA reported in 2020 that authorities had opened “security centers,” or “convenience” police stations, throughout Lhasa. RFA described the security centers’ role as “subverting local indigenous populations through surveillance.”

According to multiple sources in the TAR and in other Tibetan areas, officials continued to maintain a watch list of family members, relatives, and close friends of self-immolators to prevent them from meeting and communicating with international visitors, and, in some cases, deprived them of public benefits.

In March, RFA reported the PRC established 697 “Discipline Committees” across Tibet that included 1,960 “inspectors” assigned to surveil inhabitants in towns and rural areas. A source told RFA, “Any Tibetans traveling there from outside these regions have to show a document stamped with a travel permit.” RFA stated authorities maintained “tight controls over information flows in the region, arresting Tibetans for sharing news and opinions on social media and for contacting relatives living in exile.”

VOA reported in March that authorities continued to monitor and ban the use of social media apps and virtual private networks in Tibet. Sources stated security officials searched the phones of Tibetans and often threatened to cut off basic social services if they remained in contact with their

relatives in India or elsewhere abroad. In its report *Party Above Buddhism*, ICT stated surveillance of internet and social media activities of monks had “deeply affected the monastic community, as they are at the forefront of resistance against the Communist Party of China’s atrocities in Tibet... Monks have faced arrest for messages deemed ‘illegal’ for sharing images of the Dalai Lama or talk about the state of the Tibetan language.”

RFA reported in November that authorities issued government mobile phones to Tibetan former prisoners, particularly political prisoners, as a means of further monitoring their movements. One former prisoner told RFA, “Cell phones issued by the government have tracking devices installed in them that note your location and who you are meeting. The SIM card used in these phones is directly linked to a government control office[.]” TCHRD reported authorities forced some Tibetan former prisoners in Qinghai Province to wear ankle bracelets that monitored movements, recorded conversations, and set off alarms when the person crossed set boundaries or attempted to tamper with the bracelet.

Human rights groups stated authorities continued to use the “Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region,” adopted in January 2020, to further impose central government control and Han culture on the Tibetan population and to encourage Tibetans to become informants on each other. As part of the government’s January “Regulations on Counter-espionage Security of the Tibet Autonomous Region,” authorities deployed what ICT characterized as “deceptive language” to persuade Tibetans that their neighbors and foreigners were a threat to national security. According to ICT, “Pressure on individual Tibetans to report on their neighbors is intensified by the widespread use of surveillance technologies. If cameras and facial recognition algorithms pick up activity deemed suspicious, those who witnessed it, yet failed to report it, also fall under suspicion, and may face interrogation at length.”

A Jamestown Foundation 2020 report, *Xinjiang’s System of Militarized Vocational Training Comes to Tibet*, stated that the government employed “grid management” and a “double-linked household” system to surveil and control communities. Under a grid management system, neighborhoods and communities were divided into smaller units with administrative and security staff who maintained detailed databases on everyone living in that grid. The system “corrals regular citizens into the state’s extensive surveillance apparatus by making sets of 10 ‘double-linked’ households report on each other.” Tibet.net reported in March that authorities rewarded individuals with money and other forms of compensation for reporting on neighbors who were “extremist” or “splittist.” The maximum reward for information leading to the arrests of social media users deemed disloyal to the government was 300,000 renminbi (\$47,100), six times the average per capita GDP in the TAR, according to local media.

According to human rights groups and media sources, authorities frequently checked mobile phones for pictures of the Dalai Lama and other content that was considered sensitive. There were reports that authorities surveilled ordinary Tibetans for years after finding such material.

In its report *Party Above Buddhism*, ICT stated monks and nuns were “also under constant pressure to change their ideological underpinnings, which are based on Buddhist philosophy. The authorities require the monks and nuns to ‘correct’ their thoughts by checking themselves and criticizing each other.” ICT published photographs of monks studying CCP ideology. The report stated, “The active presence of police forces the monastics to constantly ask themselves whether anything they do could be considered illegal.”

Sources stated authorities forced monasteries to display portraits of CCP leaders and the national flag.

Human rights groups and local sources reported that during the year, authorities continued to expand the requirement that families replace images of the Dalai Lama and other lamas in their homes with portraits of preeminent CCP leaders, including Chairman Mao and President Xi. Previously, this policy was only compulsory for families that were dependent on state support under the poverty alleviation program. According to local sources, authorities required all monasteries, schools, and offices in the TAR and Tibetan areas to display pictures of CCP leaders. Sources said authorities conducted inspections to check for compliance.

In addition to the prohibition on the open veneration of the Dalai Lama, including the display of his photograph, the government continued to ban pictures of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama and nearly all Tibetan Buddhists recognize as the 11th Panchen Lama. In some counties of the TAR, punishments for displaying images of the Dalai Lama included expulsion from monasteries. Local sources told RFA that officials from government bureaus monitoring religious practice visited Tibetan schools and warned teachers and students not to keep or display photographs of the Dalai Lama.

Local sources reported that “The 20 Prohibitions” were still in force. These regulations, instituted in the TAR in 2019, forbade monks from using social media to “incite subversion, defame or insult others, assist extremist religious groups, provide undisclosed information of the state to domestic or foreign individuals or organizations, or receive or release illegal information.” TAR government offices also announced that those who misused social media could be imprisoned for up to eight years.

Authorities increased the surveillance of, and efforts to restrict, access to WeChat and other social media. TCHRD reported that on August 4, the CCP’s Central Propaganda Department, in conjunction with nine other party and government departments and agencies, held a video conference launching a campaign to crack down on “illegal” online activities. The other participants were the Central Cyberspace Administration, Supreme People’s Court, Supreme People’s Procuratorate, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, Ministry of Public Security, State Administration of Taxation, State Administration for Market Regulation, State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, and the All-China Association of Journalists. Within a week of the campaign’s announcement, Tibetan diaspora sources reported Tibetans were detained following random searches of personal phones and contents posted on WeChat.

RFA reported that on July 20, police in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province arrested Konmey, the head of the discipline committee at Ngaba’s Trotsik Monastery, on suspicion of holding politically sensitive discussions on WeChat. According to a local source, Konmey was arrested solely because he recited prayers on WeChat. The source stated, “He said nothing at all about political issues.”

Free Tibet reported in January that PRC authorities in Nagchu Prefecture, TAR, replaced a Tibetan mantra, “The Jewel is the Lotus,” which was written in Tibetan on a hillside in letters large enough to be seen from planes landing at Nagchu Dagring Airport, with an image of China’s flag and the slogan, “Long Live the Motherland,” in Mandarin. Accompanying the article were before-and-after aerial photographs showing where the mantra had been and what had replaced it. Free Tibet stated the Tibetan mantra had once been ubiquitous throughout Tibet, but authorities were methodically replacing the phrase throughout the region.

Free Tibet reported that in late October, authorities in Drago (Luhuo) County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province ordered Drago Monastery officials to demolish the monastery’s Gaden Rabten Namgyal Ling school, saying the buildings violated local land-use laws. The school trained young monks in Tibetan language and grammar, Mandarin, English, and Madhyamaka and other Buddhist doctrines. Authorities ordered 130 students attending the school to return to their homes.

RFA reported that on December 12, authorities in Drago County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, destroyed a 30-meter (99-foot) tall statue of the Buddha. Authorities said the statue, which was built in 2015, was constructed without county authorization. They also burned prayer flags and destroyed prayer wheels around the statue. RFA later reported that authorities took four individuals from the Gaden Namgyal Ling Monastery in Drago into custody days before the statute’s demolition, including the abbot, his assistant, and two monks.

Multiple sources reported the government continued to interfere in the religious education of laypersons and children. Authorities in the TAR required monks to cancel all classes with children, warning that monks and parents could have their social security benefits restricted or be detained if classes continued. The ban on religious education was also implemented in some places outside of the TAR.

The Tibet Action Institute (TAI) published a report in December that stated nearly 80 percent of all Tibetan school children – roughly 800,000 students – were forced to attend state-run boarding schools. According to the report, the government maintained “a vast network of colonial boarding schools in Tibet where students live separated from their families and subjected to highly politicized education, primarily in Chinese.” The report concluded that these schools were “the cornerstone of an assimilationist agenda advanced by Chinese President Xi Jinping himself, intended to preempt threats to Chinese Communist Party control by eliminating ethnic differences.” The TAI report outlined government efforts to “remold” Tibetan youth through a system of education that eliminated “all but token elements of their ‘Tibetanness.’” The report stated the boarding school system was at the heart of the CCP’s effort to subsume Tibetans into Chinese culture and identity.

The TAI report stated that due to the government’s efforts over the last decade to eliminate monasteries as an option for Tibetan education, Tibetan parents were “compelled by a lack of viable alternatives to send their children to boarding schools.” The TAI report also presented evidence that the government used fines and threats to coerce parents into sending their children to state-run boarding schools. The TAI report indicated that Tibetan parents had concluded that sending their children to these schools was the only way for the children to “survive in their profoundly changing world.”

ICT reported in March that TAR regulations required schools to incorporate national security programming and counterespionage “security knowledge” into the curriculum for school children, in accordance with national regulations that called for school curriculums to ensure students “adhered to the correct path” by “strengthening the party’s leadership, enhancing political ideology, and practicing core socialist values.”

Local sources reported that during the year, provincial officials in the TAR and other Tibetan areas again banned all underage students from participating in religious activities during school holidays. School officials again required students to sign an agreement stating they would not participate in any form of religious activity during the summer.

RFA reported that beginning in April, schools in Nagchu Prefecture, TAR posted regulations prohibiting parents of schoolchildren from carrying rosaries, prayer wheels, or other religious items on school grounds. A source told RFA the new regulations stated that “schools are places to cultivate and produce socialist scholars and should not be used as places in which to follow rituals and traditions.” The source said authorities were “stepping up their efforts to spread the party’s ideology in Tibetan counties, towns, monasteries, and schools” in advance of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP.

According to RFA, local sources expressed concern that restrictions on the use of the Tibetan language in Tibetan schools, where preference was given to instruction in Mandarin, were causing Tibetan children to lose fluency in their own language. Authorities also suppressed informally organized language courses in monasteries and towns, which they labeled illegal associations, and subjected teachers to detention and arrest.

The government continued to maintain that Gyaltzen Norbu, whom it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama’s true reincarnation, and not Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whom authorities had disappeared that same year. Norbu remained the vice president of, and highest-ranking Tibetan in, the government-affiliated BAC. According to numerous Tibetan Buddhist monks and scholars, the SARA and provincial religious affairs bureau officials frequently pressured monks and laypersons, including government officials, to attend religious study sessions presided over by Norbu.

In accordance with official guidelines for monastery management, leadership of and membership in committees and working groups remained restricted to individuals the guidelines described as “politically reliable, patriotic, and devoted monks, nuns, and party and government officials.” General administrative affairs in TAR monasteries, which monks traditionally managed, continued instead to be overseen by monastery management committees and monastic government working groups, both of which were composed primarily of government officials and CCP members, in addition to a few government-approved monks. Since 2011, the government had established such groups in all monasteries in the TAR and in many major monasteries in other Tibetan areas.

In its report *Party Above Buddhism*, ICT reported multiple CCP and government bureaus were involved in the “social management” of monasteries. According to ICT, “24 Party and government entities maintain control of monasteries in Ngaba (Aba) Prefecture as per article 4 of the ‘Notice of the People’s Government of Ngaba Prefecture on Issuing the Interim Measures for the Administration of Tibetan Buddhist Affairs in Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture’ issued in 2009.”

The traditional monastic system reportedly continued to decline as many senior Buddhist teachers from Tibet remained or died in India or elsewhere abroad. The heads of most major schools of Tibetan Buddhism – including the Dalai Lama, Karmapa, Sakya Trizin, and Khatok Getse Rinpoche, as well as Bon leader Kyabje Menr Trizin – all continued to reside abroad. The government also banned India-trained Tibetan monks, most of whom received their education from the Dalai Lama or those with ties to him, from teaching in Tibetan monasteries in China, although there were reportedly rare exceptions made for progovernment monks.

As in previous years, senior monks at some monasteries continued to report informal agreements with local officials whereby resident monks would not stage protests or commit self-immolations as long as the government adopted a hands-off approach to the management of their monasteries. Sources said authorities monitored all financial transactions involving monasteries inside Tibet and entities abroad.

According to media and NGO reports, the CCP maintained a list of state-approved “living buddhas.” Such individuals reportedly continued to undergo training on patriotism and the CCP’s socialist political system. In 2018, the BAC announced its database contained 1,311 “living buddhas” that it deemed “authentic.” The Dalai Lama was reportedly not on the list. This database reportedly overlapped with the newly established database required by the “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” which also included monks who were not “living buddhas.”

According to sources, every individual on the official reincarnation database received political training in state ideology, entirely separate from religious training, that emphasized that their career and role in the religious community depended on motivating religious believers “to love the party, love the country and social stability maintenance work, as well as fight against ‘separatism’ and the Dalai Lama.” On source said, “This means that now the Tibetan reincarnations are becoming Communist-trained talents rather than religious leaders.” Religious leaders continued to report that authorities incentivized lamas and monks to leave monastic life voluntarily by emphasizing the attributes of secular life, as compared to the more disciplined and austere religious life. Monastery leaders cited continued revisions to education policies, religion regulations, and government control of monastery management as reasons for the declining number of young monks. Religious leaders and scholars continued to say these and other means of interference continued to cause them concern about the ability of religious traditions to survive for successive generations.

In December, HRW reported an unnamed senior Party official visited three townships in Sog County, TAR, in November “to ensure local Tibetan officials endorse government policies on the recognition of Tibetan Buddhist incarnations.” According to state-run media, more than 120 township officials, staff of monastery management committees, village-based cadres, village officials, local police, and schoolteachers attended sessions with the official at which they “unanimously declared their willingness to follow laws and regulations concerning Tibetan Buddhist incarnation affairs.”

Sources said the state required monks and nuns to demonstrate – in addition to competence in religious studies – “political reliability,” “moral integrity capable of impressing the public,” and willingness to “play an active role at critical moments.” Since the policy’s inception in 2018, many major monasteries and religious institutes implemented political training programs. The ICT report *Party Above Buddhism* contained numerous examples of monks and nuns viewing CCP propaganda materials and studying the “Four Standards for Monks and Nuns,” which included compliance with “the standard on political reliability.” According to the ICT, the four standards policy “in essence requires the monastic community to be loyal to the Communist Party of China and embrace socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

According to media reports, authorities continued “patriotic reeducation” campaigns at many monasteries and nunneries across Tibetan areas. All monks and nuns were required to participate in several sessions of “legal education” per year, during which they were required to denounce the Dalai Lama, express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, study President Xi’s speeches, learn Mandarin, and hear lectures praising the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system.

According to multiple government media sources, the PRC conducted a series of training sessions for Tibetan Buddhist clergy during the year. In September, the UFWD hosted a seven-day training session for clergy across the TAR that included “patriotic films” and “theoretical political education” and focused on the clergy’s role in upholding principles of the CCP. The curriculum included studying the National Security Law and speeches by President Xi.

Media reported that in April, the UFWD hosted a five-day training session for 40 Tibetan nuns in the TAR that focused on advocating “love of country,” “maintaining national unity,” and following the CCP.

Authorities continued to ban minors younger than 18 from participating in monastic training. Multiple sources reported authorities forced underage monks and nuns to leave their monasteries and Buddhist schools to receive “patriotic education.” Journalists reported police arrested, and in some cases beat, some underage monks who refused to cooperate, and that parents and other family members were also threatened with loss of social benefits if underage monks did not comply.

Government officials regularly denigrated the Dalai Lama publicly and accused the “Dalai clique” and other “outside forces” of instigating Tibetan protests, stating such acts were attempts to “split” China. Throughout the year, then TAR Communist Party Secretary Wu Yingjie publicly criticized the Dalai Lama’s “clique” and called on party cadres to eliminate the negative influence the Dalai Lama had on religion. The *Economist* reported that Wu publicly replied to a letter purportedly written by a Tibetan herder in February, calling for him to share the message that Tibetans must “reduce religious consumption” and eliminate the Dalai Lama’s “negative influence.”

RFA reported on March 11, the government-recognized Panchen Lama, Gyaltsen Norbu, in his capacity as a member of the Chinese People’s Consultative Congress, told the congress, “Foreign anti-China forces have been hyping Tibet issues and religious issues in China, and transforming the topics into political bargaining chips.”

State-run media reported that during President Xi’s visit to Qinghai Province in July, he called on Tibetans to “resolutely implement the decisions and deployments of the CCP Central Committee” and strive to “write the Qinghai chapter of building a modern socialist country in an all-round way.” Xi also visited the TAR on July 21-22, where he urged Tibetans to “follow the party.” According to the

state-run media outlet *Xinhua*, Xi instructed local provincial officials to work toward making people in Tibet identify more with the “great motherland, Chinese people, Chinese culture, the Chinese Communist Party, and socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

The Chinese internet company Baidu reported that Wang Yang, chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, delivered a speech in Tibet in August in which he said, “Over the past 70 years, Tibetan ethnic unity has shown historic progress. We adhere to the correct path of solving ethnic problems with Chinese characteristics, eliminate ethnic discrimination and ethnic estrangement in the old society, defeat the separatist and sabotage activities of the Dalai clique and foreign hostile forces, and promote the unity and struggle of all ethnic groups for common prosperity and development.”

Authorities continued to justify in state media their interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating the monasteries with “separatism” and pro-independence activities.

During the year, there were no reports that the Boundary Management System Agreement signed by the PRC and the government of Nepal in 2019 had been used to return long-staying Tibetan refugees to the PRC from Nepal. Tibetan advocacy groups had stated when the agreement was signed that the provision requiring both countries to hand over citizens who illegally crossed the Nepal-China border was potentially in conflict with Nepal’s international commitments under the Convention Against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as a “gentlemen’s agreement” with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees that provides for Tibetan refugees in Nepal’s custody to transit to India.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, most individuals were unable to travel abroad during the year, including for religious purposes. In past years, individuals seeking to travel for religious purposes reported continued difficulties traveling to India for religious training, meetings with religious leaders, or to visit family members living in monasteries. In many cases, Public Security Bureau officials refused to approve their passport applications. In other cases, prospective travelers were able to obtain passports only after paying bribes to local officials. Some individuals seeking to travel said they could only obtain passports after promising not to travel to India or not to criticize government policies in Tibetan areas while overseas. In some cases, family members were required to sign a guarantee that passport applicants would return from their travel. According to local sources, numerous Tibetans in Gansu, Qinghai, and Sichuan Provinces waited up to 10 years to receive a passport, often without any explanation for the delay. There were also instances of authorities confiscating and canceling previously issued passports, reportedly as a way of preventing Tibetans from participating in religious events in India involving the Dalai Lama.

Tibetans who traveled to Nepal and planned to continue to India reported that PRC officials visited their families’ homes in Tibet and threatened their relatives if they did not return immediately. Sichuan Province and TAR officials continued to require religious travelers returning from India to attend political training sessions. According to sources, these restrictions had prevented thousands of Tibetans from attending religious training in India.

Restrictions remained in place for monks and nuns living abroad, particularly those in India, which made it difficult or impossible for them to travel into Tibetan areas.

Tibetans who returned from India reported facing difficulties finding employment or receiving religious or secular education. Returning Tibetans were not allowed to study at Chinese monasteries, and most were denied admission to secular schools because they did not have education certificates recognized by the government. Local sources said some Tibetans were subject to additional government scrutiny as a result of having relatives at religious institutions in India.

According to sources, authorities in some areas continued to enforce special restrictions on Tibetans staying at hotels inside and outside the TAR. Police regulations forbade some hotels and guesthouses in the TAR from accepting Tibetan guests, particularly monks and nuns, and they required other hotels to notify police departments when Tibetan guests checked in.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Tibetans, particularly those who wore traditional and religious attire, regularly reported being denied hotel rooms, refused service by taxi drivers, and discriminated against in employment and in business transactions.

Many Han Buddhists continued to demonstrate interest in Tibetan Buddhism and donated money to Tibetan monasteries and nunneries, according to local sources in such monasteries and nunneries. Tibetan Buddhist monks frequently visited Chinese cities to provide religious instruction to Han

Buddhists. In addition, a growing number of Han Buddhists visited Tibetan monasteries, although officials sometimes imposed restrictions that made it difficult for Han Buddhists to conduct long-term study at many monasteries in Tibetan areas. State propaganda reported on these activities.

Media and NGOs reported that monasteries collected donations to purchase and distribute personal protective equipment to local residents and populations in other parts of China during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The PRC continued to tightly restrict diplomatic access to the TAR and to deny the U.S. embassy in Beijing requests to visit the area. No U.S. diplomats were allowed to visit the TAR during the year.

U.S. officials repeatedly raised concerns about religious freedom in Tibet with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels. U.S. officials, including the Secretary of State, the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, who was appointed in December, the Charge d’Affaires, and other Department of State and embassy officials continued sustained and concerted efforts to advocate for the rights of Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions and language without interference from the government. The Charge d’Affaires and other U.S. embassy officials regularly expressed concerns to the Chinese government at senior levels, including central government and provincial leaders, regarding severe restrictions imposed on Tibetans’ ability to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom and cultural rights. The Charge d’Affaires pressed senior PRC officials on the government’s refusal to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama. U.S. officials continued to underscore that only the Dalai Lama and other faith leaders could decide the succession of the Dalai Lama, and they also raised concerns about the disappearance of the Panchen Lama. In addition to raising systemic issues, such as impediments to passport issuance to Tibetans, U.S. officials expressed concern and sought further information about individual cases and incidents of religious persecution and discrimination, and they sought increased access to the TAR for U.S. officials, journalists, and tourists, including for religious pilgrims and those traveling for other religious purposes.

During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Tibet, including continuing visa restrictions on PRC government and CCP officials that the U.S. government had determined to be “substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan areas,” pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018.

In July, the U.S. Secretary of State met with Central Tibetan Administration representative Ngodup Dongchung in New Delhi.

On March 9, the State Department spokesperson stated, “We believe that the Chinese Government should have no role in the succession process of the Dalai Lama. Beijing’s interference in the succession of the Panchen Lama more than 25 years ago, including by ‘disappearing’ the Panchen Lama as a child and attempting to replace him with a PRC government-chosen successor – it remains an outrageous abuse of religious freedom.” On April 22, speaking on the disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Department of State spokesperson said in a statement, “We respect Tibetans’ right to select, educate, and venerate their own leaders, like the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, according to their own beliefs, and without government interference. We call on the [PRC] government to immediately make public the Tibetan-venerated Panchen Lama’s whereabouts and to give us the opportunity to meet with him in person.”

In January, the then U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues met virtually with the Dalai Lama. According to RFA, the Dalai Lama “stressed the importance of preserving Tibet’s Buddhist religion[.]”

On June 22, the United States joined a group of 44 countries 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 December 20, the Secretary of State selected the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights to serve concurrently as the new U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues. In his announcement, the Secretary said the Special Coordinator would continue to “promote respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Tibetans, including their freedom of religion or belief[.]”

Although U.S. officials were denied access to the TAR during the year, they maintained contact with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners, as well as NGOs in other Tibetan areas, to monitor the status of religious freedom.

The embassy and consulates used social media to deliver direct messaging about religious freedom in Tibet to millions of Chinese citizens. In March, the embassy posted the Secretary of State’s remarks to PRC State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, noting that the Secretary “raised concerns about a range of PRC actions that undermined the international rules-based order and that run counter to our values and interests and those of our partners, including actions related to human rights, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, the East and South China Seas, and Taiwan.” Following the U.S. President’s November virtual meeting with President Xi, the embassy posted on WeChat and Weibo, “President Biden raised concerns about the PRC’s practices in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, as well as human rights more broadly.”

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ecoi.net summary:
Tibet: Annual report on religious freedom (covering 2021)



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China

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