

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Findings

- During the 2023 reporting year, the Commission observed ongoing violations of religious freedom by the Chinese Communist Party and government, aimed at increasing state control of believers in both registered and unregistered religious communities.
- The Party and government took steps to implement measures pertaining to religion passed over the last several years, including measures regulating finances, venues, online activity, and religious clergy.
- Authorities required religious groups affiliated with Party-controlled religious associations to participate in educational and ceremonial events surrounding the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, designed to reinforce “sinicization” among religious bodies.
- The Party and government sought to closely monitor and regulate Taoist and Buddhist groups, ensuring their adherence to the Party line and national agenda. In one instance, authorities used a controversial incident at a Buddhist temple to crack down on religious venues nationwide.
- National Religious Affairs Administration authorities launched searchable databases of approved Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic clergy.
- PRC authorities continued to control and forcibly assimilate Hui Muslims throughout the country. According to a joint report released by two nongovernmental organizations, authorities have used counterterrorism policies instituted in Xinjiang to bar a range of Muslim practices, imposed “sinicization” to eradicate distinct ethnic and religious characteristics, and have “scattered” and relocated Hui communities under the rubric of Xi Jinping’s “poverty alleviation” campaign.
- The Chinese Communist Party and government have continued their efforts to assert control over Catholic leadership, community life, and religious practice, installing two bishops in contravention of the 2018 Sino-Vatican agreement and accelerating the integration of the church in Hong Kong with the PRC-based, state-sponsored Catholic Patriotic Association and its Party-directed ideology.
- PRC authorities continued to violate the religious freedom of Protestants, engaging in pressure campaigns against unregistered churches by detaining church leaders and targeting several influential “house” church networks, renewing their campaign against Chengdu municipality, Sichuan province’s Early Rain Covenant Church.
- Chinese authorities continued to prosecute Falun Gong practitioners under Article 300 of the PRC Criminal Law, which criminalizes “organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law.” In December 2022, Falun Gong practitioner and radio host Pang Xun died after authorities tortured him while in custody.
- The Party’s Anti-Cult Association updated their list of *xiejiao* (a historical term usually translated as “evil cults” or “heretical

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teachings”), a tool it uses to rank groups according to threat level and communicate its enforcement priorities.

Recommendations

Members of the U.S. Congress and Administration officials are encouraged to take the following actions:

- Call on the Chinese government to guarantee freedom of religion to all citizens in accordance with its international human rights obligations. Stress to PRC authorities that freedom of religion includes the right to freely adopt beliefs and practice one’s religion without government interference.
- Call for the release of religious leaders and practitioners whom Chinese authorities confined, detained, or imprisoned for peacefully pursuing their religious beliefs, including lay Buddhist **Wu Aping**; Muslim imam **Ma Zichang**; Catholic bishop **Augustine Cui Tai**; Protestant pastors **Lian Changnian**, **Li Jie**, and **Han Xiaodong**; and Falun Gong practitioners **Zhou Deyong** and **Peng Shuming**, as well as those confined, detained, or imprisoned in connection with their association with those citizens. The Administration should use existing laws to hold accountable Chinese government officials and others complicit in severe religious freedom restrictions, including the sanctions available in the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (Public Law No. 114-328) and the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Public Law No. 105-292). Ensure that conditions related to religious freedom are considered when negotiating trade agreements.
- Call on the Chinese government to fully implement accepted recommendations from the November 2018 session of the U.N. Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review, including: taking necessary measures to ensure that the rights to freedom of religion and to religious culture and expression are fully observed and protected; cooperating with the U.N. human rights system, specifically U.N. special procedures mandate holders; taking steps to ensure that lawyers working to advance religious rights can practice their profession freely and promptly investigating allegations of violence and intimidation impeding their work; and considering possible revisions to legislation and administrative rules to provide better protection of freedom of religion.
- Call on the Chinese government to repeal Article 300 of the PRC Criminal Law, which criminalizes “organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law” and Article 27 of the PRC Public Security Administration Punishment Law, which provides for detention or fines for organizing or inciting others to engage in “cult activities” and for using a “cult” or the “guise of religion” to “disturb social order” or to harm others’ health.

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Introduction

During the 2023 reporting year, the Commission observed ongoing violations of religious freedom by the Chinese Communist Party and government, aimed at increasing control of believers in both registered and unregistered communities.¹ Authorities implemented a series of measures issued over the past several years, targeting the finances, funding structures, leadership, use of venues, online activities and content, and doctrinal autonomy of religious institutions.² The Party and government also used the occasion of the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party to ensure ideological conformity of religious groups with the policy of “sinicization” (*zhongguohua*), defined by Xi Jinping in his speech at the 20th Party Congress as “actively guid[ing] religion to adapt to socialist society.”³ Religious practitioners, communities, and institutions faced increased surveillance as the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) rolled out several major digital oversight and enforcement initiatives.

International and Chinese Law on Religious Freedom

Both Chinese and international law guarantee religious freedom. Under international law, freedom of religion or belief encompasses both the right to form, hold, and change convictions, beliefs, and religions—which cannot be restricted—and the right to outwardly manifest those beliefs, which can be limited by certain justifications.⁴ These principles are codified in various international instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).⁵ Article 36 of China’s Constitution guarantees citizens “freedom of religious belief” and protection for “normal religious activities.”⁶ However, by leaving terms such as “normal” undefined, China’s Constitution fails to protect the same range of beliefs and outward manifestations as is recognized under international law.⁷ Nevertheless, China’s Constitution and other legal provisions⁸ align with the ICCPR in prohibiting discrimination based on religion⁹ and loosely parallel the ICCPR’s prohibition on coercion¹⁰ by forbidding groups or individuals from compelling citizens to believe or not believe in any religion.¹¹ China’s Constitution prohibits “making use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt social order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the State.”¹²

Regulations and Policies Pertaining to Religious Freedom

Since 2022, the Party and government have taken steps to draft and implement measures pertaining to religion, bolstering their control over religious believers in both registered and unregistered communities. These include:

- **Measures for the Financial Management of Venues for Religious Activities (2022).**¹³ These measures bring religious venues’ finances more directly under the joint oversight of the Ministry of Finance and the NRAA.¹⁴ They require that venues provide all donors with a numbered receipt issued by the pro-

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vincial religious affairs bureau.¹⁵ According to one pastor, this allows the state to more closely supervise foreign donations and further weakens the independence of local, government-affiliated churches, which previously enjoyed some level of financial autonomy.¹⁶

• **Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services (2022).**¹⁷ In July 2022, provincial authorities in multiple provinces reported holding trainings for the implementation of the measures.¹⁸ In Guangdong province, authorities announced that hundreds of candidates had qualified as auditors and would be tasked with monitoring and licensing religious content in accordance with the measures.¹⁹ Providers of online religious content and internet users attempting to access such content or to openly discuss religion reported reduced freedom to operate in light of the measures.²⁰ In one instance, the China-based Catholic mobile application CathAssist announced that it would be shutting down operations indefinitely after repeatedly attempting to procure a license under the new requirements.²¹ Several religious websites in China reported censorship of certain religious words on WeChat, including the words “Christ,” “church,” and “Bible.”²²

• **Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel (2021).**²³ In February 2023, the NRAA rolled out a database of “approved” Buddhist and Taoist clergy, in a first step toward developing similar databases for all religious groups in compliance with the Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel (2021).²⁴ In May 2023, the NRAA announced the rollout of databases for Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic clergy.²⁵

• **Measures for the Management of Venues for Religious Activities.** In March 2023, the NRAA released a draft for comment of new measures governing sites for religious activity that would heavily regulate the use, funding, personnel, accepted activities, and other aspects of religious sites, in effect covering “all aspects” of religious life, according to one advocacy group.²⁶ When adopted, they will replace the 2005 measures by the same name.²⁷ The draft version of the new measures includes additional ideological content and ideological requirements for religious sites, including a requirement that sites establish an education system and regularly organize study sessions for personnel on Party guidelines, PRC law, and Chinese traditional culture, among other topics.²⁸

<p>Sinicization of Religious Groups and the 20th Party Congress</p> <p>During the Commission’s 2023 reporting year, Chinese Communist Party authorities required religious groups affiliated with Party-controlled religious associations to participate in educational and ceremonial events surrounding the 20th Party Congress that were designed to reinforce “sinicization” among religious bodies. Taoist and Buddhist state-affiliated institutions held trainings to study the “spirit of the 20th Party Congress,” and official Islamic and Protestant religious communities organized joint viewings of the event.²⁹ Religious associations also produced reports for the 20th Party Congress, with the chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement—the organization governing Protestant churches in China—publishing a lengthy article on the status of the “sinicization” of religion in China and announcing the formulation of a new Five-Year Plan for the sinicization of Christianity.³⁰ Members of unregistered and sensitive religious groups faced increased repression during the lead-up to the 20th Party Congress.³¹ According to Radio Free Asia and ChinaAid Association, in the months preceding the Congress, authorities escalated “stability maintenance” efforts, for example harassing clergy and members of Shouwang Church in Beijing municipality and Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu municipality, Sichuan province.³²</p>
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Buddhism (Non-Tibetan) and Taoism

The Chinese Communist Party and government’s relationship with Buddhist and Taoist groups has continued to reflect the tension between appropriation of these groups by PRC leadership and coercive control,³³ both of which infringe on the ability of these religious groups to exercise their freedom of religion in accordance with international standards.³⁴ Consistent with the Party and central government’s “sinicization” policy, PRC officials have embraced Taoist and Buddhist groups that are perceived as serving the Party’s agenda, closely regulating them to ensure they continue to do so.³⁵ To this end, in February 2023, Xinhua reported that the Buddhist Association of China (BCA) and the Taoist Association of China had launched a searchable online database of Buddhist and Taoist religious personnel indicating who is permitted to participate in state-sanctioned religious activities, citing concerns about “fraud.”³⁶ One Buddhist monk said that, because he did not appear in the database, he would not be able to register with a temple or participate in any religious activities.³⁷

PRC authorities have also continued to seek closer alignment of Buddhist and Taoist religious identity with the Party and government’s conception of China’s national identity, emphasizing the Chinese character of these faiths and guarding against “outside influence.” Consequently, the Party and government have closely circumscribed the “eastward movement” of Tibetan Buddhism outside of the Tibet Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas, limiting the number of Han Chinese Buddhists studying at Tibetan Buddhist institutions and largely prohibiting Tibetan Buddhists from preaching outside of Tibetan areas.³⁸ In Yunfu municipality, Guangdong province, local BCA officials issued a notice calling on all Buddhist temples, institutions, and religious sites to “resolutely resist” the

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“illegal” preaching of Tibetan monks.³⁹ According to the notice, the unauthorized spread of Tibetan Buddhism outside of Tibetan areas poses a threat to believers, families, property, and “social harmony” and impedes the growth of non-Tibetan schools of Buddhism in the region.⁴⁰ [For information on religious freedom for Tibetan Buddhists, see Chapter 17—Tibet.]

In an apparent effort to maintain the patriotic integrity of Chinese Buddhism and respond to public outcry, public security officers in Xuanwu district, Nanjing municipality, Jiangsu province, raided Nanjing’s Xuanzang Temple after reports emerged on social media that the temple housed memorial tablets dedicated to five Japanese war criminals and an American missionary known for protecting Chinese refugees in the city during the Japanese occupation.⁴¹ Following the raid, Xuanwu public security officials criminally detained lay Buddhist **Wu Aping**, who paid for the tablets in an attempt to “resolve grievances” and “relieve suffering,” according to her televised confession.⁴² Following the incident, the BCA and the National Religious Affairs Administration launched a nationwide campaign to “rectify” Buddhist temples, requiring that Buddhist institutions cultivate the “correct” perspective on national security, history, culture, national identity, and religion, with “zero tolerance of any behavior jeopardizing national interests and hurting national feelings,” leading some observers to posit that the incident is being used as a pretext for tightening ideological oversight of Buddhism at the national level.⁴³

Islam

This past year, PRC authorities continued to exert control over and forcibly assimilate Hui Muslims throughout the country.⁴⁴ According to a joint report by Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) and Hope Umbrella International Foundation (HUIF) released in March 2023, the Chinese Communist Party and government have taken a three-pronged approach to targeting the Hui Muslim minority group: using counterterrorism policies instituted under the “strike hard” campaign in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to bar and sanction a range of Muslim religious practices; imposing “sinicization” policies to eliminate expressions of cultural and religious distinctiveness and promote assimilation; and using the pretext of Xi Jinping’s flagship “poverty alleviation” program to “scatter” and “relocate” Hui communities through mass resettlement projects.⁴⁵ These resettlement projects—many of which originated prior to Xi but have since been adopted as “poverty alleviation”—have disproportionately targeted Hui Muslims throughout the country.⁴⁶ For example, since 1983, authorities in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region have used an “ecological migration” program to relocate Hui Muslims, often to other minority areas, supposedly for purposes of environmental protection, poverty alleviation, and “ethnic unity,” though scholars have maintained that the stated objectives are cover for “dispersing and dislocating ethnic minority groups.”⁴⁷ As recently as 2020, government-led “labor transfer” programs have targeted Hui Muslims by recruiting them for job opportunities in outside regions and provinces, sometimes citing explicitly political reasons, such as “social stability” and national unity.⁴⁸ CHRD and HUIF have also reported that Hui

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Muslim participants in government-led labor transfer programs have been unable to practice their religion due to lack of religious accommodations in areas where they have been relocated.⁴⁹

The Commission also observed the continued demolition of “Arab-style” domes and minarets on mosques, in one case leading to large-scale protests:⁵⁰

- In August 2022, authorities in Fangshan district, Beijing municipality, began “rectification” of Doudian Mosque, built in 2013 and the largest in northern China, to remove Arabic language and elements of “Arab style” from the mosque’s building.⁵¹ One Beijing-based scholar of religion, Xi Wuyi, described the decision to “sinicize” Doudian Mosque as symbolically significant, because it demonstrates “the capital persisting in the orderly advancement of the sinicization of religion in China.”⁵²
- Authorities in Zhaotong municipality, Yunnan province, also began “rectification” work on Zhaotong East Mosque, according to photographs provided to Bitter Winter, an online magazine that reports primarily on religious repression in China, and published in September 2022.⁵³ Zhaotong municipality has been the site of previous demolitions: according to religious freedom organization Christian Solidarity Worldwide, only three out of more than 100 local mosques retained their domes and minarets, as officials had removed them from nearly all of the mosques there.⁵⁴
- In May 2023, authorities in Nagu township, Tonghai county, Yuxi municipality, Yunnan, attempted to “sinicize” the historic Najiaying Mosque, by removing its “Arab-style” dome and minarets.⁵⁵ According to witness reports, thousands of residents of the majority-Muslim township gathered at the mosque to protest the removals after construction cranes were seen entering the mosque’s courtyard.⁵⁶ Authorities also deployed hundreds of police in riot gear and a People’s Liberation Army unit to the site.⁵⁷ When police forcibly prevented residents from entering the mosque for noontime prayer, several protesters reportedly threw bricks and bottles at them.⁵⁸ One local source told CNN that authorities detained dozens of protesters.⁵⁹ U.S.-based Hui rights advocate Ma Ju said that Imam **Ma Zichang**, who led protesters in prayer outside the mosque, was among those detained.⁶⁰ Authorities had previously announced plans to conduct a similar “rectification” of the culturally and historically significant Grand Mosque in Shadian township, Gejiu city, Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan, in June 2023.⁶¹ [For more on the Yunnan mosque demolition protests, see Chapter 7—Ethnic Minority Rights.]

[For more information on Uyghur, Hui, and other Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and other locations, see Chapter 7—Ethnic Minority Rights and Chapter 18—Xinjiang.]

Christianity—Catholic

COMPLIANCE WITH THE SINO-VATICAN AGREEMENT

The Chinese Communist Party and government have continued their efforts to assert control over Chinese Catholic leadership, community life, and religious practice.⁶² The Sino-Vatican Agree-

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ment of 2018 established a mechanism for appointing bishops who are in “full communion” with the pope and “recognized by authorities of the People’s Republic of China.”⁶³ According to one expert, the original agreement allowed for a possible two-year extension of the agreement “to be followed by a formal agreement or its suspension.”⁶⁴ After first extending the agreement in 2020, the Holy See renewed it on a provisional basis in 2022, a “clear sign that . . . there is a desire to continue the dialogue but also a certain dissatisfaction with the results.”⁶⁵

In November 2022, the Bishops’ Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) “installed” Bishop Peng Weizhao—at the time serving as Holy See-recognized bishop of the diocese of Yujiang in Jiangxi province, a historic diocese not recognized by Chinese authorities—as the “auxiliary bishop of Jiangxi,” a designation not recognized by the Holy See.⁶⁶ The Holy See characterized the action as not being in conformity with the 2018 Agreement.⁶⁷ The Holy See also cited reports that the appointment followed “prolonged and intense pressure by the local authorities.”⁶⁸ On April 3, 2023, AsiaNews reported that a new bishop would be installed in the diocese of Shanghai, considered China’s most important and the destination for a popular Chinese Catholic pilgrimage.⁶⁹ On April 4, the BCCCC held a ceremony installing Monsignor Shen Bin as bishop of Shanghai, which the Holy See said it learned of after the event had taken place, and then only from media reports.⁷⁰ At the installation, Shen said that he would continue to promote the tradition of “loving the country and loving religion,” persevere in “independence and self-governance,” and pursue the “sinicization” of Catholicism.⁷¹

COERCION AND REPRESSION OF CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES

During the Commission’s 2023 reporting year, officials exerted pressure on both registered and unregistered Catholic communities, taking coercive action against churches and detaining members of the clergy. In Baoding municipality, Hebei province, authorities have targeted the Baoding diocese, home to one of the oldest and largest unregistered communities in China, forcibly detaining or disappearing at least 10 priests since April 2022.⁷² One of the priests detained in 2022 and later released reported that authorities subjected the men to a program of political indoctrination, after which several consented to join the official church, while authorities have kept those who did not consent under surveillance and prevented them from exercising their pastoral ministry roles.⁷³ Authorities also demolished at least two unregistered Catholic properties, including a church in Luancheng district, Shijiazhuang municipality, Hebei, and a residence for nuns and priests in Datong municipality, Shanxi province.⁷⁴

Control of the Catholic Church in Hong Kong

This past year, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region authorities accelerated efforts to more closely align the Roman Catholic Church in Hong Kong with the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). In July 2022, Reuters reported that the Holy See’s unofficial envoy in Hong Kong had warned Catholic missions in Hong Kong to prepare for a rollback of religious freedom protections and the possible institution of mainland-like restrictions on religious bodies.⁷⁵ Over the ensuing months, Hong Kong Catholic bishops participated in two meetings with CPA counterparts.⁷⁶ In November 2022, the CPA, the Bishops’ Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC), and the Holy Spirit Study Centre of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong jointly organized an online exchange focused on the “sinicization” of Catholicism, with BCCCC Chair Shen Bin presiding over the opening of the exchange and Hong Kong bishop emeritus Cardinal John Tong offering the opening prayer and delivering a speech.⁷⁷ In April 2023, Hong Kong bishop Stephen Chow visited Beijing municipality on a trip that was the “first of its kind” for a Hong Kong bishop since 1994.⁷⁸ At a prayer service in Beijing, Bishop Chow said that Hong Kong Catholics should “love the country and the church.”⁷⁹ [For more information on the suppression of civil society in Hong Kong, see Chapter 19—Hong Kong and Macau.]

Christianity—Protestant

During this reporting year, PRC authorities continued to violate the religious freedom of Protestants, engaging in pressure campaigns against unregistered churches by detaining their leaders and surveilling their activities and participants.⁸⁰ Local authorities also continued to use the charge of “fraud” to target several influential unregistered or “house” churches and networks, indicating that such churches are understood by Chinese Communist Party and government officials to constitute an ongoing threat.⁸¹ Widespread violations of Protestants’ freedom of religion included:

- **Renewed crackdown on Early Rain Covenant Church.**

- In August 2022, Wuhou district, Chengdu municipality, Sichuan province, public security officers raided and forcibly dispersed a Sunday worship gathering of Early Rain Covenant Church (ERCC) members at a tea house in Wuhou, registering attendees’ names and information.⁸² Authorities took into custody writer Xing Hongwei, known as A Xin, when he refused to register, criminally detaining him on suspicion of assaulting a police officer, though ERCC maintains that Xing did not initiate the physical altercation that ensued.⁸³
- Over the past year, at least four ERCC leaders and members reported that property managers at their places of residence attempted to forcibly evict them and their families after pressure from local authorities because of their connection with the church.⁸⁴
- In late February 2023, prior to the annual meetings of the National People’s Congress and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in March, authorities in Chengdu began to harass ERCC leaders and members, in an effort to deter

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them from holding Sunday worship services.⁸⁵ When the church continued to hold services, Jintang county public security and Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs personnel raided the church on March 12, taking into custody pastor Wu Wuqing and at least six other church leaders, with police beating deacon Jia Xuewei.⁸⁶ Authorities released all seven the same day but several days later administratively detained pastor **Ding Shuqi** and member **Shu Qiong**.⁸⁷

- **Prominent “house” church networks targeted.**

- In August 2022, public security officers in Yaodu district, Linfen municipality, Shanxi province took into custody Linfen Covenant Church pastors **Li Jie** and **Han Xiaodong**, and Li’s wife, **Li Shanshan**, placing them under “residential surveillance at a designated location” (RSDL, a form of secret detention), later criminally detaining Li Jie and Han Xiaodong on suspicion of “fraud.”⁸⁸ Authorities detained two other Linfen Covenant coworkers and banned the church and its associated school as “illegal social organizations.”⁸⁹ [For more information on “illegal social organizations” and being designated as such, see Chapter 2—Civil Society—Regulations and Policy Pertaining to Civil Society—Social Organizations Deemed “Illegal.”]

- In August 2022, Baoqiao district, Xi’an municipality, Shaanxi province, public security officers raided the residences of Xi’an Church of Abundance pastors **Lian Changnian** and **Lian Xuliang**, placing them under RSDL for six months along with coworker **Fu Juan**, during which time they report that they were tortured and physically abused.⁹⁰ In March 2023, they were arrested on suspicion of “fraud.”⁹¹

- **Digital surveillance and control of religion.**

- This past year, as part of the Henan Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs’ “Smart Religion” program, Henan province launched a mobile phone application that believers must use to register in advance of attending a religious service.⁹²

Falun Gong

Chinese authorities continued to crack down on the practice and propagation of Falun Gong, prosecuting Falun Gong practitioners under Article 300 of the PRC Criminal Law, which criminalizes “organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law.”⁹³ The Falun Gong-affiliated website Minghui reported the deaths of dozens of Falun Gong practitioners due to mistreatment while in custody and hundreds of cases of Falun Gong practitioners being sentenced by authorities, apparently for their connection with Falun Gong.⁹⁴ In its submission for the review of China’s compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Dui Hua Foundation noted that women are disproportionately represented in criminal cases involving “unorthodox religious groups” and that most of these women belong to Falun Gong and the Church of Almighty God (see Other Religious Communities in this chapter).⁹⁵ Moreover, Dui Hua reports that Chinese authorities have meted out “hefty prison

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sentences” to both male and female Falun Gong practitioners in “key roles.”⁹⁶

Chinese public security officials have continued to subject Falun Gong practitioners to torture, physical abuse, and mistreatment while in custody.⁹⁷ Examples from this reporting year include:

- In February 2023, a Twitter user identifying himself as a friend of Sichuan Radio and Television host and Falun Gong practitioner **Pang Xun** asserted that authorities had beaten Pang to death while in custody, posting a video of Pang’s dead body.⁹⁸ Public security officials in Chengdu municipality, Sichuan province, initially detained Pang in 2020 in connection with his alleged dissemination of Falun Gong leaflets, sentencing him to five years in prison for “organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law.”⁹⁹
- In December 2022, Minghui reported that the Taonan Municipal People’s Court in Taonan city, Baicheng municipality, Jilin province, had sentenced Chinese traditional medicine doctor and Falun Gong practitioner **Peng Shuming** to five years in prison for “organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law.”¹⁰⁰ Taonan Public Security Bureau (PSB) Detention Center officials physically abused Peng while in custody.¹⁰¹ Minghui also reports that local authorities interfered with Peng’s lawyer’s efforts to defend his client.¹⁰²

Other Religious Communities

- According to a report produced by the Church of Almighty God, the PRC central government has continued to crack down on this new religious movement as part of a three-year campaign launched in 2020, sentencing over one thousand practitioners to prison terms of over three years in 2022.¹⁰³
- This past year, the Chinese Communist Party’s Anti-Cult Association published an updated list of *xiejiao*, a historical term usually translated as “evil cults” or “heretical teachings” and used by the Party to refer to new religious movements it perceives as threatening.¹⁰⁴ The list includes Falun Gong, the Church of Almighty God, the Association of Disciples, the Shouters, and the Unification Church among its top ten entries.¹⁰⁵ One expert on the regulation of new religious movements in China says that the Anti-Cult Association lists *xiejiao* in order of perceived threat level.¹⁰⁶

Notes to Chapter 3—Freedom of Religion

¹“Registered” religious communities refer to religious communities, institutions, or venues that register with one of the state-affiliated patriotic religious associations established to oversee religion in China: the Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Chinese Christian Council, the Catholic Patriotic Association, the Islamic Association of China, and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. “Unregistered” communities refer to those communities, institutions, or venues that opt not to register with the state-affiliated oversight bodies, either on the basis of religious convictions, because registration may be too onerous, or for other reasons. For more information on the use, practice, and significance of registration for religious groups in China, see Sarah Cook, Freedom House, “The Battle for China’s Spirit: Religious Revival, Repression, and Resistance under Xi Jinping,” February 2017, 15, 32–33, 53; Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, “2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: China (Includes Hong Kong, Macau, Tibet, and Xinjiang),” May 15, 2023; Eleanor Albert and Lindsay Maizland, “Religion in China,” Council on Foreign Relations, updated September 25, 2020.

²National Religious Affairs Administration and Ministry of Finance, *Zongjiao Huodong Changsuo Caiwu Guanli Banfa* [Measures for the Financial Management of Venues for Religious Activities], passed January 28, 2022, effective June 1, 2022; National Religious Affairs Administration, *Zongjiao Jiaozhi Renyuan Guanli Banfa* [Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel], effective May 1, 2021; National Religious Affairs Administration et al., *Hulianwang Zongjiao Xinxi Fuwu Guanli Banfa* [Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services], issued December 3, 2021, effective March 1, 2022; National Religious Affairs Administration, Guojia Zongjiao Shiwu Ju guanyu “*Zongjiao Huodong Changsuo Guanli Banfa (zhengqiu yijian gao)*” *gongkai zhengqiu yijian de tongzhi* [Notice of solicitation of public comments on the National Religious Affairs Administration “Measures for the Management of Venues for Religious Activities (draft for public comment)”], reprinted in *China Christian Council and Three-Self Patriotic Movement Online*, March 28, 2023.

³Xi Jinping, “Gaoju Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida qizhi, wei quanmian jianshe shehui zhuyi xiandaihua guojia er tuanjie fendou—zai Zhongguo Gongchandang Di Ershi ci Quanguo Daibiao Dahui shang de baogao” [Raise high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, wage a united struggle to comprehensively establish a modern socialist country—report at the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party], October 16, 2022, reprinted in *Xinhua*, October 25, 2022.

⁴Paul M. Taylor, *Freedom of Religion: U.N. and European Human Rights Law and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 19, 24, 203–4.

⁵Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by U.N. General Assembly resolution 217A (III) of December 10, 1948, art. 18; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by U.N. General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, entry into force March 23, 1976, art. 18. Article 18 of the ICCPR upholds a person’s right to “have or adopt a religion or belief” and the “freedom . . . to manifest [that] religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.” Article 18 also prohibits coercion that impairs an individual’s freedom to freely hold or adopt a religion or belief. See also Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, adopted and proclaimed by U.N. General Assembly resolution 36/55 of November 25, 1981. China has signed and stated its intent to ratify the ICCPR, which obligates China to refrain in good faith from acts that would defeat the treaty’s purpose. State Council Information Office, “Guojia Renquan Xingdong Jihua (2016–2020 Nian)” [National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2016–2020)], September 29, 2016, sec. 5; United Nations Conference on the Law of Treaties, Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, adopted May 23, 1969, entry into force January 27, 1980, art. 18.

⁶*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xian Fa* [PRC Constitution], passed and effective December 4, 1982, amended March 11, 2018, art. 36.

⁷*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xian Fa* [PRC Constitution], passed and effective December 4, 1982, amended March 11, 2018, art. 36; Liu Peng, “A Crisis of Faith,” *China Security* 4, no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 30.

⁸See, e.g., *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xian Fa* [PRC Constitution], passed and effective December 4, 1982, amended March 11, 2018, art. 36; State Council, *Zongjiao Shiwu Tiaoli* [Regulations on Religious Affairs], issued November 30, 2004, amended June 14, 2017, effective February 1, 2018, art. 2; *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Laodong Fa* [PRC Labor Law], passed July 5, 1994, effective January 1, 1995, amended December 29, 2018, art. 12.

⁹International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by U.N. General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, entry into force March 23, 1976, art. 26.

¹⁰International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by U.N. General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, entry into force March 23, 1976, art. 18(2).

¹¹*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xian Fa* [PRC Constitution], passed and effective December 4, 1982, amended March 11, 2018, art. 36; State Council, *Zongjiao Shiwu Tiaoli* [Regulations on Religious Affairs], issued November 30, 2004, amended June 14, 2017, effective February 1, 2018, art. 2.

¹²*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xian Fa* [PRC Constitution], passed and effective December 4, 1982, amended March 11, 2018, art. 36; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by U.N. General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, entry into force March 23, 1976, art. 18; U.N. Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion), CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, July 30, 1993, para. 8. The ICCPR does allow State Parties to restrict outward manifestations of religion or belief, but such restrictions must be “prescribed by law and . . . necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.”

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¹⁸“Quanguo xing zongjiao tuanti lianxi huiyi di ershi ci huiyi kaishi” [Twentieth joint conference of nationwide religious groups begins], *United Front Work Department News*, July 7, 2022; Guangdong Province Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission, “Guangdong sheng minzu zongjiao shiwu weiyuanhui guanyu hulianwang zongjiao xinxi shenhe renyuan nengli ceshi jieguo de gonggao (er)” [Guangdong province ethnic and religious affairs commission announcement regarding the results of the internet religious information auditors aptitude test (two)], July 11, 2022; Attonoy Li, “Reviewing How the Administrative Measures for Internet Religious Information Services Carried Out in Past Months before September 1,” *China Christian Daily*, September 2, 2022. For past coverage of the Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services, see Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *2022 Annual Report* (Washington: November 14, 2022), 99–100.

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⁴⁵Chinese Human Rights Defenders and Hope Umbrella International Foundation, “Will the Hui Be Silently Erased?,” March 22, 2023.

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⁶⁰Ma Ju (@majui@mail1122), “!!Ju Najiaying renshi chongchu chongwei, maoxian chuan lai de xinxi ...” [!According to the information from the Najiaying people who broke out of the siege ...], Twitter, June 2, 2023, 9:03 p.m. For more information on Ma Zichang, see the Commission’s Political Prisoner Database record 2023-00137.

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