

CECC Annual Report 2021

KEY FINDINGS

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

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- Building upon the Regulations on Religious Affairs (2018) and the Measures on the Administration of Religious Groups (2020), the National Religious Affairs Administration implemented new Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel, effective May 1, 2021. The new measures include plans to establish a database of clergy that records their basic information, rewards and punishments, travel for religious work, and religious activities. They require clergy to promote the “sinicization of religion” and to “adhere to the principle of independence and self-management of religion,” meaning religious personnel in China must resist “domination” or “infiltration” by “foreign forces,” reject unauthorized appointments to leadership positions made by foreign religious groups or institutions, and reject domestic or overseas donations that violate national regulations.
- Chinese authorities used the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic as a pretext to shut down religious sites and restrict religious activities, including online activities, even after other normal activities in society had resumed.
- Authorities in several provinces demolished or altered Buddhist, Taoist, and Chinese folk religious temples, sometimes beating local believers who resisted, and destroyed Buddhist literature and punished publishers.
- The Sino-Vatican agreement on the appointment of bishops signed in September 2018, and renewed in 2020, has led to the Holy See’s approval of seven Chinese government-appointed bishops and the joint approval of five bishops as of July 1, 2021. In spite of the agreement, the contents of which remain secret, authorities subjected unregistered (“underground”) Catholic clergy to detention, surveillance, and removal from active ministry for resisting pressure to sign an agreement of separation (i.e., “independence”) from the Holy See and register with the government. Authorities also continued either to demolish church buildings or to “sinicize” them by removing crosses and other religious symbols, and canceled religious activities and pilgrimages under the pretext of COVID-19 precautions.
- As in previous years, authorities continued to detain Falun Gong practitioners and subject them to harsh treatment, with at least 622 practitioners sentenced for criminal “cult” offenses in 2020, according to Falun Gong news outlet Minghui. Minghui also reported that Chinese authorities continued to

torture and mistreat practitioners, and that such abuse, sometimes occurring over several years, caused or contributed to the deaths of dozens of practitioners in 2020 and 2021.

- In addition to committing human rights violations against Uyghurs and other Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Chinese authorities, in the name of “sinicizing Islam,” expanded their suppression of Muslim groups throughout China to include the Hui, Utsul, and Dongxiang Muslims. Violations included demolishing or altering mosques, or placing surveillance cameras inside them; closing Islamic schools; and restricting Islamic preaching, clothing, and Arabic script.

- Authorities subjected registered Protestant churches to human rights violations similar to those committed against other religious groups and continued to raid and shut down religious gatherings, demolish or alter church buildings, and detain, prosecute, and sentence leaders of unregistered “house churches.” Authorities sentenced one Christian online bookseller to seven years in prison.

- Authorities continued to use Article 300 of the PRC Criminal Law, which forbids “organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law,” to persecute members of spiritual groups deemed to be illegal or to be “cults” (*xiejiao*), including the Church of Almighty God, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Association of Disciples.

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Recommendations

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

- Call on the Chinese government to guarantee freedom of religion to all citizens in accordance with its international human rights obligations. Stress to Chinese authorities that freedom of religion includes the right to freely adopt religious beliefs and engage in religious practices without government interference.

- Stress to the Chinese government that the right to freedom of religion includes the right of Buddhists and Taoists to carry out activities in temples and to select monastic teachers independent of state control; the right of Catholics to be led by clergy who are selected, and who conduct their ministry, in accordance with the standards called for by Catholic beliefs; the right of Falun Gong practitioners to freely practice Falun Gong inside China; the right of Muslims to freely preach, undertake overseas pilgrimages, select and train religious leaders, and wear clothing with religious significance; the right of Protestants to exercise their faith free from state control over doctrine and worship, and free from harassment, detention, and other abuses for public and private manifestations of their faith, including the display of crosses; and the right of members of other religious communities to be free from state control and harassment.

- Call for the release of Chinese citizens confined, detained, or imprisoned for peacefully pursuing their religious beliefs, 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 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 taken into account when negotiating trade agreements.

- Call on the Chinese government to fully implement accepted recommendations from the November 2018 session of the UN Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review, including taking necessary measures to ensure that rights to freedom of religion, religious culture, and expression are fully observed and protected; cooperating with the UN human rights system, specifically UN special procedures and mandate holders; facilitating a visit to China by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; 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.

- Work with Vatican officials to publicly address increased repression of Catholics in China, offer technical assistance to protect Vatican diplomatic communications from Chinese cyberattacks, and offer diplomatic assistance, as appropriate, to reevaluate the 2018 Sino-Vatican agreement on the appointment of bishops, and advocate for the publication of the original agreement and any negotiated revisions in order to transparently evaluate the Chinese government’s compliance.

- Call on the Chinese government to abolish 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.

- Advocate for the release of Pastor John Cao, a U.S. lawful permanent resident arbitrarily arrested, sentenced, and imprisoned in China, according to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and an alleged example of the Chinese government’s willingness to use “hostage diplomacy.”

- Encourage U.S. political leaders to visit religious sites in China to raise awareness of and promote freedom of religion.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Introduction

During the 2021 reporting year, the Commission observed the Chinese government's ongoing violations of religious freedom through policies and actions aimed at increased control of believers in both registered and unregistered communities. The government continued to use its policy of "sinicizing religion" to increase its control over the five officially recognized religions—Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity (Catholic and Protestant).¹ In recent years authorities have increased their control or suppression of religions that previously enjoyed greater tolerance, such as Islam, or even official support, such as Taoism and Buddhism.² In addition to increasing control and surveillance over registered Christians, authorities cracked down harder on unregistered ("underground" or "house church") communities, shutting down churches and pressuring unregistered clergy.³ Authorities also continued to suppress other religions and spiritual movements,⁴ and to crack down on those whose activities they regard as illegal, some of which they also regard as *xiejiao*, translated as "evil cults" or "heterodox teachings."⁵ Observers noted that authorities increased their use of advanced surveillance technology to monitor predominantly Muslim ethnic groups,⁶ used COVID-19 precautions as a pretext to increase surveillance and detain religious practitioners, and prohibited religious activities while nearby secular activities were allowed to resume.⁷ The U.S. State Department also noted that "Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners reported severe societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities."⁸

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 specific justifications.⁹ These principles are codified in various international instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹⁰ Article 36 of China's Constitution guarantees citizens "freedom of religious belief" and protection for "normal religious activities."¹¹ With terms such as "normal" undefined, it is unclear whether China's Constitution intends to protect the same range of beliefs and outward manifestations that is recognized under international law.¹² In any case, China's Constitution and other legal provisions¹³ align with the ICCPR in prohibiting discrimination based on religion¹⁴ and loosely parallel the ICCPR's prohibition on coercion¹⁵ by forbidding groups or individuals from compelling citizens to believe or not believe in any religion.¹⁶ 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."¹⁷

Regulations and Policies Pertaining to Religious Freedom

Building upon the Regulations on Religious Affairs (2018) and the Measures on the Administration of Religious Groups (2020), the National Religious Affairs Administration implemented new Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel, effective May 1, 2021.¹⁸ The new measures call for the National Religious Affairs Administration to establish a database of clergy that records their basic information, rewards and punishments, travel for religious work, and religious activities.¹⁹ They further require clergy to promote the “sinicization of religion” and “adhere to the principle of independence and self-management of religion,” meaning religious personnel in China must resist “domination” or “infiltration” by “foreign forces,” reject unauthorized appointments to leadership positions made by foreign religious groups or institutions, and reject domestic or overseas donations that violate national regulations.²⁰

The Chinese government and Communist Party continued to promote the policy of “sinicization” (*zhongguohua*) for the five officially recognized religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Catholic and Protestant Christianity) and use it to commit rights violations against at least four of them.²¹ Two scholars have observed that the Party employs the term, which means to assimilate to Chinese culture, for political rather than cultural aims.²² Sociologist Richard Madsen wrote in 2019 that in the “sinicization” campaign, “the main imperative is to homogenize Chinese Culture to make all parts conform to a Party-led nationalism and to use the full force of the state to control any dissenting voices.”²³ Yang Fenggang, a scholar of Chinese religions at Purdue University, argued that the Party’s use of the English term “sinicization” is inappropriate because in Party usage, “*zhongguohua* is not about cultural assimilation, but political conformity and obedience.”²⁴ One imam in Dunhua city, Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Jilin province, compared the atmosphere under the “sinicization of religion” to that of the repressive Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976).²⁵

This past year, authorities increased official restrictions on “illegal” religious activities and organizations. In January 2021, the Party Central Committee and State Council issued an opinion on revitalizing the countryside and modernizing agriculture that proposed “strengthening the crackdown on illegal religious activity in the countryside and outside infiltration, and putting a stop to the exploitation of religion to meddle in rural public affairs.”²⁶ In addition, in March 2021, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) and 21 other Party and state ministries and departments jointly published a notice on “rooting out the soil for breeding” illegal social organizations and “purifying the ecological space for social organizations.”²⁷ The MCA also announced a “special operation” to further crack down on five categories of “illegal social organizations,” including groups “falsely operating under the banner of religion.”²⁸ One published list of “illegal” organizations in Sichuan province included one Buddhist and several Christian organizations.²⁹ In November 2020, the Ministry of Justice published a draft entitled, “Detailed Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Foreign Religious Activities in the People’s Republic of China.”³⁰ One former official told the Party-run media

outlet Global Times that the rules aimed to “prohibit some forces from infiltrating into China under the guise of religion for terrorist or separatist activities.”³¹

Widespread Violations of Religious Freedom

Advocacy groups reported that authorities attempted to suppress and control religious groups and individuals, employing common tactics against multiple groups, including the following examples:

- Authorities in various provinces in recent years have illegally detained Protestant Christians, underground Catholics, and Falun Gong practitioners in secret mobile “transformation” facilities, pressuring them to renounce their faith using brainwashing techniques, confinement in rooms without light or ventilation, beatings, verbal abuse, and mental torture.³²
- Authorities in multiple cities reportedly ordered census takers to report signs of religious activity in citizens’ homes, especially targeting Protestants, Catholics, Falun Gong adherents, and any activity by groups designated as cults (*xiejiao*).³³
- Authorities in at least 13 provinces cracked down on the printing or possession of religious books or media by Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Church of Almighty God believers, burning or destroying books and sentencing publishers to prison terms.³⁴
- Authorities in three different regions aimed to prevent youth under age 18 from participating in religious activities, using methods including banning them from religious gatherings, frightening a group of young children, demanding that parents agree in writing not to allow their children into churches, raiding the homes of religious families, and sending a 14-year-old girl to an indoctrination facility and threatening her with negative consequences unless she ceased her religious practice.³⁵
- Authorities used COVID-19 precautions and inspections as reasons to close or alter Buddhist, Taoist, Protestant (“Three-Self”), and folk religious sites,³⁶ and ordered the cancellation of Catholic pilgrimages and other religious activities even though non-religious venues remained open.³⁷

Buddhism (Non-Tibetan), Taoism, and Chinese Folk Religion

U.S.-based non-governmental organization Freedom House estimated in 2017 that China has 185 to 250 million Buddhists and hundreds of millions of followers of various folk traditions.³⁸ The government’s relationship with Chinese Buddhists (not including Tibetan Buddhists) and Taoists in recent years has reflected the tension between promotion of these traditions, based on perceived benefits to Party goals, and coercive control.³⁹ Authorities in recent years have promoted Buddhism, Taoism, and Chinese folk religion as elements of “fine traditional Chinese culture” that counter the perceived detrimental influences of foreign religions, especially Christianity and Islam,⁴⁰ while at the same time controlling or suppressing them at the local level.⁴¹ In a 2014 speech, Party General Secretary Xi Jinping referred to Buddhism (which came to China from India) as a model of integration with Chinese culture,

referring to it as “Buddhism with Chinese characteristics.”⁴² Despite such outward statements of support for Buddhism and Taoism, authorities nevertheless require them to undergo “sinicization” and require adherents to support the leadership of the Party.⁴³

Observers reported that government efforts to counter the influence of religion in favor of nationalism under Party leadership⁴⁴ included the following actions:

- Authorities in multiple provinces demolished or closed Taoist and Buddhist temples, sometimes converting them into cultural centers with no religious activities, and covered or removed religious statues.⁴⁵
- On September 15, 2020, the Xiushui county government of Jiujiang municipality, Jiangxi province, dispatched more than 100 officials to demolish the Sanye Temple, a folk religious site; some of these officials beat protesters.⁴⁶
- On September 27, 2020, government officials in Ruichang city, Jiujiang municipality, demolished the newly constructed Lingyinguan Taoist Temple.⁴⁷
- On October 17, 2020, more than 20 uniformed law enforcement officers and others at Bailong Temple, a historic Buddhist temple in Jiujiang, beat local believers who resisted the demolition of a newly built courtyard wall.⁴⁸
- Authorities in Fujian province ordered the removal of elderly residents from two nursing homes, one run by a state-approved Buddhist temple and one run by a state-approved Protestant church, and subsequently demolished the building.⁴⁹
- Authorities in several locations confiscated and burned Buddhist books and literature, or ordered their removal from bookstores, often replacing them with books by Party General Secretary Xi Jinping, and prohibited the copying of religious texts.⁵⁰

[For information on religious freedom for Tibetan Buddhists, see Section V—Tibet.]

Islam

The State Council Information Office reported in 2018 that Islam was the majority religion for 10 ethnic minority groups, totaling over 20 million persons.⁵¹

The Chinese government and Communist Party continued to expand a crackdown on Uyghur and other Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) by heightening restrictions on Hui Muslims, who comprise the third largest ethnic minority in China,⁵² and imposing controls on Utsuls, a community in the island province of Hainan with historic ties to Muslims abroad,⁵³ and Dongxiang Muslims in Gansu province.⁵⁴ Los Angeles Times Beijing bureau chief Alice Su wrote that official “sinicization” and “poverty alleviation” campaigns aim to “erase foreign influence and bring religion under state control” and “eradicate poverty through mass resettlement, job training and sending cadres into villages to teach the Communist Party’s will.”⁵⁵ The aim of the campaigns, wrote Su, “is to mold a future patterned after Han-majority China,

with urban jobs, material dreams, and strengthened loyalties to the Party and its leader.”⁵⁶

Chinese authorities, under a campaign to “sinicize” Islam, continued to violate the right to freedom of religion for Muslims during this reporting year. Examples include the following:

- Authorities prohibited Muslim religious gatherings in multiple cities and shut down Islamic schools run by Utsuls in Sanya municipality, Hainan province.⁵⁷
- In October 2020, the National Religious Affairs Administration, together with seven other government entities, issued rules preventing many Muslims from making the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca by only allowing officially arranged trips, and imposing a de facto political test for applicants.⁵⁸ According to a Uyghur-American rights advocate, authorities have harassed and tortured persons who made the Hajj pilgrimage independently (which XUAR authorities have prohibited since 2014).⁵⁹ He also said that Uyghurs accounted for a small proportion of those making approved Hajj pilgrimages because of official limitations, including difficulty in obtaining passports and a restriction on Uyghur pilgrims under 60 years old.⁶⁰
- Authorities in several locations, including Hebei, Jilin, Henan, and Gansu provinces and the Xinjiang Uyghur and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Regions, destroyed or “rectified” mosques by removing prominent Islamic features such as domes and replacing them with Chinese-style roofs.⁶¹
- In Gansu, authorities implemented poverty alleviation efforts alongside “sinicization” measures among the Dongxiang minority, a population of around 600,000, offering “improved livelihoods while demanding a shift from religious to political devotion.”⁶² In recent years, authorities brought housing to the community, but also enforced mandatory schooling in Mandarin and prohibited religious education and fasting among the Dongxiang; community members expressed fear that these would lead to the eradication of the Dongxiang language.⁶³
- In Linxia city, Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu, once known as “little Mecca,” Party cadres prohibited Hui minors from entering mosques for Friday prayers.⁶⁴ Authorities prohibited the call to prayer as a “public nuisance,” even though Linxia’s population is 60 percent Muslim, and canceled religion and Arabic classes for Hui children.⁶⁵
- Authorities in multiple locations ordered the removal of halal (meaning permissible under Islam) food signs in Arabic from shops, causing hardship for Muslims seeking to follow dietary rules.⁶⁶ Authorities also attempted to prevent Muslim women from wearing headscarves.⁶⁷

In a reversal from previous years, in Sanya municipality, Hainan province, officials targeted the Utsuls, a Muslim community of less than 10,000, as part of a campaign against foreign religions and influence.⁶⁸ Sanya authorities ordered local mosque leaders to move loudspeakers used to announce daily prayer from minarets (towers) to the ground and lower the volume.⁶⁹ Authorities also stopped the construction of a new mosque to prevent “Arab” architectural features, issued a ban on traditional dress, and barred minors from

studying Arabic.⁷⁰ One observer said this situation in Hainan “proves how mentalities have changed” among Chinese authorities.⁷¹ Another observer said, “This is about trying to strengthen state control. It’s purely anti-Islam.”⁷²

Authorities continued to detain, among others, the following Hui Muslims during this reporting year:

- **Jin Dehuai**, 46, a Hui businessman from the XUAR. In 2017, a court in Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture, XUAR, sentenced Jin to life for “separatism” related to his activities with Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim religious movement.⁷³
- **Nie Shigang**, 51, from Shaanxi province. In 2019, a court in Artush (Atushi) city, Kizilsu (Kezilesu) Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture, XUAR, sentenced Nie to five years for “money laundering” after he assisted Uyghurs in transferring funds to Egypt-based relatives.⁷⁴

[For more information on Uyghur, Hui, and other Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and other locations, see Section IV—Xinjiang, Section II—Ethnic Minority Rights, and the Commission’s staff report, “Hui Muslims and the ‘Xinjiang Model’ of State Suppression of Religion.”]

Christianity—Catholic

Unofficial estimates of China’s Catholic population vary between 10 and 12 million, including unregistered communities.⁷⁵ Authorities have pressured unregistered or “underground” (*dixia*) clergy to register with the state and join the government-run Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), which controls the officially recognized “above ground” (*dishang*) Catholic community.⁷⁶ The government and CCPA endorse the idea that the church in China should “adhere to the principles of independence and self-management”⁷⁷ and require clergy to sign a document accepting this “principle of independence”;⁷⁸ one expert explained that the Party regards this “independence” as a “detachment from the Holy See and the universal Church.”⁷⁹

Status of the Sino-Vatican Agreement

The Holy See in October 2020 announced a two-year extension of the Provisional Agreement on the appointment of bishops signed in 2018.⁸⁰ The renewal came despite the opposition of many inside and outside China.⁸¹ As of February 2021, the state-sanctioned church and the Holy See had jointly approved at least five bishops under the agreement, in addition to the Holy See's approval of seven bishops previously appointed by Chinese authorities.⁸²

Religious freedom advocates have largely opposed the agreement, the text of which has not been published,⁸³ while the Holy See's news outlet, Vatican News, referred to the appointments of two bishops under its framework as a "good start" and said the agreement is "above all the point of departure for broader and more far-sighted agreements."⁸⁴ Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin noted that not all issues of concern have been resolved by the agreement but that it represented a step in the effort to "normalise the life of the church."⁸⁵ The agreement reportedly gives the pope the final decision over bishops' appointments and allows all bishops in China to recognize his authority.⁸⁶ Pope Francis said that the agreement's scope was in part "to reestablish and preserve the full and visible unity of the Catholic community in China."⁸⁷

Reports indicate that following the signing of the agreement, Chinese authorities in some places have detained clergy and pressured them to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA)⁸⁸ and sign a pledge adhering to the principle of an "independent" church; closed unregistered churches; canceled masses and other events; and removed children and youth from church services.⁸⁹ Hong Kong Archbishop Emeritus Cardinal Joseph Zen, a vocal opponent of the agreement, said that in the past two years the Chinese Communist Party has used it as a tool to further suppress Chinese Catholics, and that it has exacerbated the division of the Catholic Church in China, adding that some in the underground church now feel betrayed after having been encouraged by the Holy See for years to persist in the underground church.⁹⁰

Examples of authorities violating the rights of Catholics in the past year include the following:

- **Augustine Cui Tai.** Authorities continued to hold underground Bishop Cui Tai of the Xuanhua diocese in Hebei province, detained since June 19, 2020, at an unknown location.⁹¹ Since 2007, he has been detained several times for long intervals.⁹²
- **Vincent Guo Xijin.** After refusing to join both the "independent church" and the CCPA and being placed under surveillance,⁹³ underground Bishop Guo Xijin, of the Mindong diocese, Fujian province, announced his resignation from public life in October 2020, shortly before the renewal of the Sino-Vatican agreement.⁹⁴
- **Liu Maochun.** On September 1, 2020, police in Fujian detained Father Liu Maochun (also of Mindong), who supported Bishop Guo and refused to join the CCPA, for which the government reportedly claims he is "ideologically radical" and tor-

tured him in Fu'an city, Ningde municipality, Fujian, using loud noise, bright light, and sleep deprivation.⁹⁵

- **Lu Genjun.** On November 2, 2020, government officials in Baoding municipality, Hebei province, detained underground priest Father Lu Genjun at an unknown location.⁹⁶ Authorities previously detained Lu on multiple occasions for his refusal to join the CCPA.⁹⁷

- **Joseph Zhang Weizhu.** In May 2021, in Hejian city, Cangzhou municipality, Hebei province, police detained underground church bishop Zhang Weizhu after around 100 police detained 10 priests who also refused to join the “independent church” and submit to the Chinese Communist Party’s leadership.⁹⁸ Authorities held them in solitary confinement, forced them to attend political indoctrination sessions, and dissolved their underground seminary.⁹⁹ Thirteen of their students were also detained temporarily and ordered to discontinue their theological studies.¹⁰⁰

Christianity—Protestant

Freedom House estimated in 2017 that China had between 60 and 80 million Protestant Christians, but the U.S. State Department notes that accurate estimates of the number of Catholics and Protestants are difficult to calculate.¹⁰¹ Documented violations of the religious freedom of Protestant Christians during this reporting year include the following:

- The detention,¹⁰² torture,¹⁰³ prosecution,¹⁰⁴ and sentencing¹⁰⁵ of church leaders and lay believers.¹⁰⁶
- The demolition,¹⁰⁷ raiding,¹⁰⁸ and forced closure of churches,¹⁰⁹ prohibition of large gatherings and holiday celebrations,¹¹⁰ and prohibition of conversion to Christianity;¹¹¹ and the conversion of a forcibly closed church building into one used for secular purposes.¹¹²
- The installation of surveillance cameras in churches¹¹³ and the requirement that Christians provide personal information upon entering churches.¹¹⁴
- Control over the publication of unapproved audiovisual religious materials.¹¹⁵

In December 2018, authorities detained over 100 members of **Early Rain Covenant Church** (Early Rain), an unregistered Protestant church in Chengdu municipality, Sichuan province, and this past year, authorities continued to target religious activities connected with the church.¹¹⁶ From March until May 2021, police and Party officials in Chengdu detained Early Rain preacher **Wu Wuqing** multiple times.¹¹⁷ On May 8, Party officials held him for at least a day, reportedly to prevent him from attending Sunday worship, and assaulted church members who waited for him at the police station.¹¹⁸ **Wang Yi**, the founding pastor of Early Rain, continued to serve a nine-year sentence for allegedly “inciting subversion of state power” and “illegal business activity” in connection with his pastoral work.¹¹⁹ Authorities reportedly transferred Wang from a detention center to Jintang Prison in Jintang county, Chengdu, after a delay of uncertain duration; authorities denied his parents’ multiple requests to visit him, allegedly because of con-

cerns about COVID-19.¹²⁰ Authorities also appeared to target the homes of Early Rain members: In January 2021, public security officials from Chengdu raided the shared home of two Early Rain members where children were receiving religious instruction and confiscated personal property from one of the residents.¹²¹ On April 21, 2021, police in Wenjiang district, Chengdu, raided a study session run by Early Rain members and temporarily detained 19 persons, including 12 children.¹²² Authorities reportedly held the children at a local police station without their parents.¹²³

Additional examples of violations of the religious freedom of Protestant Christians include:

- **Henan province.** In January 2021, authorities in Yuanyang county, Xinxiang municipality, Henan, sentenced house church pastor **Li Juncai** to five years and six months in prison and fined him 50,000 yuan (approximately US\$7,700) for opposing the forcible removal of a cross from his church and opposing authorities' demand to change messages posted inside from "Love God, love people" to "Love country, love religion."¹²⁴
- **Zhejiang province.** On September 27, 2020, a court in Zhejiang sentenced **Chen Yu** (aka **Zhang Xiaomai**) to seven years in prison and fined him 200,000 yuan (approximately US\$3,100) for "illegal business activity" for running an online Christian bookstore.¹²⁵
- **Hunan province.** On October 13, 2020, the Zhangjiajie Municipal Intermediate People's Court tried house church pastor **Zhao Huaiguo** for "inciting subversion of state power."¹²⁶ For years, local authorities had unsuccessfully pressured Zhao to register Bethel House Church with the state-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement.¹²⁷ Authorities rejected attorneys chosen by Zhao's family, and the procuratorate recommended an 18-month prison sentence.¹²⁸
- **Guangdong province.** On December 9, 2020, a court in Bao'an district, Shenzhen municipality, Guangdong, tried four employees of the **Shenzhen Tree of Life** company on charges of "illegal business activity" for producing audio Bibles and other Christian content.¹²⁹ Prosecutors recommended that **Fu Xuanjuan**, the business's legal representative, be sentenced to five years' imprisonment, employees **Deng Tianyong** and **Feng Qunhao** to three years, and employee **Han Li** to one year and six months;¹³⁰ as of July 1, 2021, the court had not announced their sentences.
- **Shanxi province.** On December 30, 2020, in Taiyuan municipality, Shanxi, around 40 public security personnel raided the home of house church preacher **An Yankui** of Xuncheng Reformed Church and detained him and others.¹³¹ Police had previously raided the church on November 15 of the same year.¹³²

Falun Gong

As in previous years, authorities continued to ban the belief in and practice of Falun Gong, detain practitioners, and subject them to harsh treatment.¹³³ Because of government suppression, it is difficult to determine the number of practitioners in China.¹³⁴ Free-

dom House estimated in 2017 that there were 7 to 10 million Falun Gong practitioners in China.¹³⁵ Chinese authorities continued to prosecute practitioners under Article 300 of the PRC Criminal Law, which criminalizes “organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law.”¹³⁶ According to Falun Gong-affiliated website Minghui, Chinese officials were responsible for the deaths of dozens of Falun Gong practitioners in 2020,¹³⁷ and at least 622 practitioners were sentenced in apparent connection with their practice of Falun Gong, with the largest numbers in Liaoning, Shandong, Sichuan, Hebei, and Jilin provinces.¹³⁸

In addition, the Commission observed the following reports of actions targeting Falun Gong practitioners and other ethnic or religious groups:

- In June 2021 a group of 12 UN human rights experts said they were “extremely alarmed” and “deeply concerned” by credible reports of forced organ harvesting in China that appears to constitute “targeting [of] specific ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities held in detention, often without [explaining] the reasons for arrest or giv[ing] arrest warrants, at different locations.”¹³⁹ Among the groups targeted, the UN group mentioned “[ethnic] minorities, Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Muslims, and Christians.”¹⁴⁰
- Minghui also documented violations of religious freedom against Falun Gong practitioners including extralegal detention¹⁴¹ and deaths that family members suspect were caused by torture.¹⁴²
- Authorities in Hangzhou municipality, Zhejiang province, and several other provinces established “anti-cult theme parks” reportedly designed to teach the “ugliness” of cults and the “beauty of Xi Jinping’s rule of law.”¹⁴³

Other Religious Communities

According to reporting from the religious freedom magazine Bitter Winter and other sources, the Chinese government has increased its repression of religious communities outside of the five religions subject to official regulation. Authorities have designated certain groups as “cults” or “heterodox teachings” (*xiejiao*), including the Church of Almighty God¹⁴⁴ and the Association of Disciples,¹⁴⁵ and prosecuted adherents under Article 300 of the PRC Criminal Law.¹⁴⁶ Local government authorities in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) published a manual for informers targeting individual followers of Falun Gong, the Church of Almighty God, and the Association of Disciples, offering cash rewards to citizens who provided information used in investigations of suspected members of cult organizations.¹⁴⁷ Throughout the year, Chinese authorities also increased anti-cult propaganda through a month-long event in the IMAR,¹⁴⁸ as well as through several theme parks featuring cartoons and “anti-cult” education.¹⁴⁹ Other reported violations of the religious freedom of members of religious communities outside of the five official regulated religions include:

- **Jews in Henan province.** According to the Jerusalem Post and Bitter Winter, this past year authorities in Henan continued to subject the small community of Jews in Kaifeng municipi-

pality to increased surveillance, monitoring, destruction of protected cultural sites, and prohibition of religious activities.¹⁵⁰

- **Church of Almighty God.** Reports indicate that in fall 2020, authorities launched a three-year nationwide crackdown against the Church of Almighty God, leading to over 1,100 detentions within three months from September to November 2020, and prison sentences for some ranging from one year and six months to nine years under Article 300 of the PRC Criminal Law.¹⁵¹

- **Association of Disciples.** In late 2020 and early 2021, authorities in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region reportedly detained 181 members of the Association of Disciples, a religious group founded in 1989, under Article 300 of the PRC Criminal Law.¹⁵²

Notes to Section II—Freedom of Religion

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⁸Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, “2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: China (Includes Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Macau),” May 12, 2021.

⁹Paul M. Taylor, *Freedom of Religion: UN and European Human Rights Law and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 19, 24, 203–4.

¹⁰Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by UN General Assembly resolution 217A (III) of December 10, 1948, art. 18; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by UN 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, proclaimed by UN 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.

¹¹*PRC Constitution*, passed and effective December 4, 1982 (amended March 11, 2018), art. 36.

¹²*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.

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¹⁴International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, entry into force March 23, 1976, art. 26.

¹⁵International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, entry into force March 23, 1976, art. 18(2).

¹⁶*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.

¹⁷*PRC Constitution*, passed and effective December 4, 1982 (amended March 11, 2018), art. 36; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, entry into force March 23, 1976, art. 18; UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion), CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, September 27, 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.”

¹⁸National Religious Affairs Administration, *Zongjiao Jiaozhi Renyuan Guanli Banfa* [Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel], effective May 1, 2021; State Council, *Zongjiao Shiwu Tiaoli* [Regulations on Religious Affairs], issued November 30, 2004, amended June 14, 2017, effective February 1, 2018; National Religious Affairs Administration, *Zongjiao*

Tuanti Guanli Banfa [Measures on the Management of Religious Groups], passed November 1, 2019, effective February 1, 2020.

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²¹The Commission observed rights violations in the name of “sinicization” against adherents of Buddhism, Islam, and Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Authorities also destroyed and altered Taoist temples and violated adherents’ rights, although “sinicization” was not cited as the reason. Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, “2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: China (Includes Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Macau),” May 12, 2021; Wang Xiaonan, “Shenru tuijin woguo zongjiao Zhongguohua lilun yanjiu” [Thoroughly advance theoretical research on China’s Sinicization of religion], Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, December 8, 2020; “Xi Jinping: Jianchi yifa zhi Jiang tuanjie wen Jiang wenhua run Jiang fumin xing Jiang changqi jian Jiang nuli jianshe xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi Xinjiang” [Xi Jinping: Persist in using the law to govern Xinjiang, with unity stabilize Xinjiang, with culture embellish Xinjiang, by enriching the people lift up Xinjiang, and for the long-term build Xinjiang; diligently construct a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics in Xinjiang], *Xinhua*, September 26, 2020; “‘Sinicization’ Campaigns Target Religious and Ethnic Minorities across China,” *China Digital Times*, February 17, 2021. See e.g., Zhang Feng [pseud.], “Catholic Sanctuary of Our Lady of Zhaojialing under CCP Attack,” December 19, 2020; Bai Lin [pseud.], “Core Socialist Values Invade Places of Worship,” *Bitter Winter*, August 20, 2020.

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