

Restriction and Suppression of Religious Freedom in China

Mainland Affairs Council, Executive Yuan

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Since the establishment of its regime, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has approached religion with a hostile and preventive attitude by imposing controls and suppressive measures. In recent years, China has made limited adjustments and relaxed certain policies and laws on religious administration due to the international concerns and pressure. The Chinese authorities' main goal is to create a more relaxed environment at home and improve China's image abroad. But in fact, China's interference and control of religious affairs have not been relaxed. Religious freedom in China remains limited within boundaries approved and delimited by the Chinese authorities.

1. China's religion policy influenced by ideology

In general, China's basic policy on religious management can be summarized as in the following: the adherence to the CCP's political leadership of religious work and control of political direction as well as major guiding policies to enable religion to adapt itself to the socialist society; religious bodies, venues, and religious affairs cannot be dominated by foreign powers; and the requirement that all patriotic religious groups accept party and governmental leadership and obey national law. According to the 1982 Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the "Administrative Rules on Religious Activities Conducted by Foreign Nationals in the People's Republic of China" passed by the State Council in 1994, and the State Council's Regulations on Religious Affairs, approved in 2004, Chinese citizens enjoy the freedom of religious belief and the state will protect normal religious activities. All these laws also stipulate, however, that foreign nationals are not permitted to establish religious organizations, liaison offices, venues for religious activities, nor operate religious schools and institutions within China. They may not recruit believers, appoint clergies, nor undertake other evangelistic activities among Chinese citizens.

2. China strictly controls religious activities

China officially recognizes five major religions today: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Christianity. Each of these religions has an association affiliated to the government. Each religion as well as religious activities of foreign nationals is

subject to "guidance and oversight" by China's State Administration for Religious Affairs and United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee.

In order to express the national spirit of independence and self-reliance, the Chinese authorities have since 1950, separated China's Catholic Church from the Roman Catholic Church and placed religious activities under the administration of the government-designated "Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA)." All religious activities conducted outside the CCPA's administration have been declared illegal, and the "underground churches" that engage in religious activities are suppressed and persecuted. With regard to Christianity, China has also established the so-called "Three-self Church" (based on the principles of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation) with the intention of making Chinese Christianity autonomous of external influences. Many Christians, however, are unwilling to accept the jurisdiction of the "Three-self Church" and have opted instead to practice their faith in unregistered places of worship at homes. These family worship places are called "house churches." The members of unregistered religious groups have constantly suffered different degrees of persecution from the Chinese authorities, including intimidation, harassment, and arrest. The members of Falun Gong organization have in particular been labeled as an "evil cult" by the Chinese authorities.

Under their firm belief in antitheism, the Chinese authorities have carried out religious suppression and persecution by labeling church organizations as foreign conspiratorial infiltration groups. They have brutally clamped down on Catholics, Christians, or many other organizations. The clergies of these groups are often arrested or rusticated to the countryside for labor reform, and their followers are forced to join the government-controlled CCPA. For example, in September 2004, Cai Zhuohua was secretly arrested for leading six house churches and publishing religious magazines. The Ministry of Public Security defined this as the "the biggest case of foreign religious infiltration in the country's history."

The Chinese authorities have also vigorously persecuted religious activities under the pretense of fighting superstitious cults. Since May 2004, for instance, the Chinese authorities have secretly issued instructions to provincial party committees and propaganda and education agencies. They were urged to strengthen Marxist atheistic propaganda and education, as well as to implement atheistic actions on a broad, multi-level, and multi-directional basis to combat the so-called "feudalistic

superstitions." Elementary and middle school students were required to swear an oath of opposition to cults, major media outlets and news websites were required to publish columns on atheism, and higher education and social science institutions were required to promote atheistic education. All of these actions contradict the Chinese authorities' professed statement of religious freedom.

3. International community sees China as a "country of particular concern" with regard to religious freedom

The issue of religious freedom in China has long attracted the attention of the international community. For examples, the U.S. Department of State has issued annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other international organizations have also regularly published human rights reports. Large sections of these reports are devoted to the subject of China's violations of religious freedom. The U.S. State Department has even listed China as a "country of particular concern"(CPC) with regard to religious freedom.

- The 2005 and 2006 Annual Reports on International Religious Freedom issued by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) stated that China continues to engage in systematic and egregious violations of religious freedom. Religious leaders and followers continue to be confined, imprisoned and harassed. The reports also listed China as a "country of particular concern" based on the severity of its violations of religious freedom.
- The U.S. State Department's 2005 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom further indicated that the members of some unregistered religious groups in China were subjected to various restrictions, including intimidation, harassment and detention. Underground Christian churches, Uighur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists and members of other organizations deemed by the Chinese authorities as "evil cults" were subjected to even closer government surveillance. Falun Gong practitioners have been arrested, detained and imprisoned, and those who refused to renounce their faith were sometimes abused in prisons and labor camps. The report further listed China as a "country of particular concern."
- The Annual Report on Human Rights issued by the European Union (EU) in 2005 called on China to remove the strict limitations imposed on religious beliefs.
- The U.S. State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for

2005 stated that although China has expanded religious protections for registered religious groups, it continued to impose restrictions on religious freedom, control religious groups, harass unregistered religious groups and detain their members; restrict the freedom of travel especially for politically sensitive persons and underground religious persons; and carry out cultural and religious repression of minorities in Tibetan areas and Muslim areas of Xinjiang. The report also noted that since China began prohibiting the Falun Gong in 1999, hundred to thousands of practitioners of the group have died in prison from torture and maltreatment.

- Human Rights Watch indicated that although China's Regulations on Religious Affairs permitted “normal” religious activities, it did not define the meaning of “normal,” nor did it define the meaning of other key terms such as “religious extremism” and “disturbing public order.” China's methods of monitoring religious activity included the requirement that all temples, churches, and mosques register with the government, signifying that their financial affairs, personnel, publications, and missionary activities are all under the government's control and jurisdiction. The content of missionary activities was also censored by the government.

4. China fabricates the false impression of religious freedom

While facing international criticism over its religious suppression, China has gradually adjusted its policies in recent years to create the false impression of religious freedom and thereby improve its international image in this regard. Specific actions included the implementation of the country's first comprehensive administrative law on religion in March 2005—the Regulations on Religious Affairs—with an emphasis on creating a legal basis for religious work. In October 2005, China released a white paper on “Political Democracy in China,” stressing that the state respects and protects the Chinese citizen’s freedom of religious belief and protects the legal rights of religious citizens, religious groups and places of religious activity against infringement. In December 2005, China set up the official website of the State Administration for Religious Affairs to promote a general picture of religious work in China.

In order to maintain its political supremacy, however, China has never allowed a new religion to rise in power. Although its constitution clearly stipulates that

“Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief,” it is apparent from other related policy documents, laws and regulations that the party-state apparatuses still exercise extremely tight control over religious affairs, including the restriction of the age and denomination of religion that people believe, requirement that CPC members and military personnel should not have religious faith, restriction of the printing and sale of religious books and places of religious activities, as well as the establishment of CCPA organizations to monitor and control religious activities. All of these actions clearly attest to the wide gap between China’s declarations of freedom of religious belief and its actual behavior. These actions are also opposite of what is understood in western democracies about freedom and protection of religious belief and the separation of church and state.

5. International community should express concerns over religious freedom in China

Taiwan is a democratic and free country. Its constitution unequivocally protects religious freedom, the government respects the people's right of faith, and through relevant policies the government encourages free engagement in religious activities. For many years now Taiwan has earned strong affirmation and praise from the international community for its high level of religious freedom. By comparison, other countries have made religious freedom one of their objectives in urging China to improve its human rights situation. Religious freedom, however, is seen by China as an internal issue that it will never let go of. Beijing and the Vatican have long been at odds with each other over the issue of bishop ordination, China’s refusal to accept Vatican’s authority over Catholics in China, and China’s use of CCPA to govern local Catholic churches. The Chinese authorities have stressed that the Vatican “should not interfere in China's domestic politics.” They have sought to prevent foreign forces, the Vatican included, from interfering with their control of religion. In response to China's consistent lack of progress on religious freedom, the EU has indicated that one of its considerations in deciding whether or not to lift the ban on arms sales to China will depend on China’s improvement on human rights and religious freedom. At the end of 2005, the vice president of the European Parliament declared that the EU could not make economic exchanges the only criteria for developing relations with China. During his meeting with Hu Jintao in April 2006, U.S. President George W. Bush strongly urged his Chinese counterpart to improve religious freedom. And on May 12,

2006, President Bush further conveyed the U.S. position on supporting religious freedom in China during a White House meeting with Yu Jie, Wang Yi, Li Boguang and other representatives of Christian house churches in China. These examples all indicate international concerns and dissatisfaction over religious conditions in China. We believe that religious freedom is a universal value that no government can deprive its people of under the false pretence of combating “evil cults.” In its interaction with China, the international community should express concerns over China's persecution of religious freedom and urge China to become a country that is truly and completely religious free.

Religious Persecution in China (November 1999 to Present)

Date	Incident	Source/Date
Nov. ~ Dec. 1999	Chinese local authorities vandalized or seized hundreds of churches and other places of worship near the coastal city of Wenzhou in Jhejiang Province.	Central News Agency) CNA; Dec. 15, 2000
Aug. 2000	According to the Connecticut, USA-based Cardinal Kung Foundation, on August 19, 2000, officials of the Fujian Provincial Bureau of Religious Affairs and Public Security Bureau arrested Catholic priest Gao Yihua and his congregation during a religious ceremony at the Shangchen Church in Jinfeng Town, Changle County, Fujian Province. The Fujian authorities never announced the charges or place of detention.	CNA; Aug. 31, 2000
June 2001	<p>Eleven Falun Gong practitioners incarcerated at the Wanjia Labor Reeducation Camp in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province were persecuted to death. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that only three people had died and that suicide was the cause of death.</p> <p>Four Falun Gong practitioners in the town of Baiguo in Macheng, Hubei Province Public were abused to death by security officials.</p>	<p>CNA; July 5, 2001</p> <p>CNA; June 29, 2001</p>
Dec. 2001	The Jingmen City’s Intermediate People's Court in Hubei Province charged seventeen people of Nanhua Church with "evil	Radio Free Asia; Jan. 1, 2002

	cult" activities. Church founders Gong Shengliang and Li Ying were sentenced, respectively to death and death penalty with a two-year reprieve. The other fifteen church members were sentenced to between two years and life imprisonment.	
Apr. 2002	On April 10, 2002, a non-official church under construction in the Zhengding County, Hebei Province, was leveled by military tanks. The church had been approved by the local government prior to construction, but provincial officials denied the permission and ordered the church to be demolished.	Radio Free Asia; Apr. 16, 2002
Sept. 2004	Cai Zhuohua was arrested on September 11, 2004 for printing Bibles and other religious works at his own expense. His wife Xiao Yunfei and her brother Xiao Gaowen and sister-in-law Hu Jinyun were arrested in Hunan Province on September 27, 2004. The Ministry of Public Security designated this as the "biggest case of external religious infiltration in the country's history."	Voice of America website; Nov. 9, 2005
Dec. 2004	On December 24, 2004, Cangnan County, Jiangsu Province mobilized 200 public security officers and military policemen to storm an underground Catholic church in Lupu Town as the adherents were attending an impromptu congregation for the Christmas celebration. The authorities demolished the congregation building and arrested the church priest Father Wang Zhongfa.	Voice of America website; Dec. 27, 2004
Mar. ~ Apr. 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● During the period from the death of Pope John Paul II to the appointment of Pope Benedict XIV, Bishop Jia Zhiguo of the underground church Catholic Zhengding Diocese in Hebei Province was placed under 24-hour surveillance from March 30 to April 25, 2005. ● On April 27, 2005, China arrested seven clergymen of the underground church Catholic Zhengding Diocese in Hebei Province, including Wang Jinshan (50 years old), Li Qiang (31 years old), Liu Wenyuan (35 years old), Zhang Qingcai (45 years old), Li Suchuan (40 years old), Pei Zhengping (43 years old), and Yin Zhongsong (32 years old). 	BBC website; Nov. 11, 2005
Aug. 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● On August 15, 2005, the Henan provincial government 	Voice of America

	<p>mobilized over thirty public security officers to storm a children's home run by a house church in Luoyang City. They arrested four U.S. church leaders and over fifty house church pastors and followers during a congregation. Among them, 41-year-old Henan missionary Zhuo Tao was sentenced in September 2005 to three years of labor reform and surveillance outside of prison. He is the nephew of Xu Yongze (Peter Xu), the founder of the "unity movement" (also known as the "Born Again Movement" or "Weeping Movement"), a group labeled as an "evil cult" by the Chinese authorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A female school teacher in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, was arrested in August 2005 by the local public security officers for teaching the Koran to her students. The police also took away over thirty students who were all minors. 	<p>website; Oct. 6, 2005</p> <p>Liberty Times; Oct. 26, 2005</p>
Sept. 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tong Qimao, a Han Chinese Christian and businessman living in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, was called into the Kashe State Public Security Bureau for questioning at the end of September 2005 and asked where his church congregated and what followers he was in contact with. Unable to answer the questions, he was severely beaten and suffered a fractured sternum. After the incident caught the attention of the foreign media, the bureau demanded that Tong sign a declaration that he wasn't beaten. When Tong refused to sign the statement, he was attacked in retaliation by several government agencies. ● Ma Yinzhou and Ma Shulei, preachers at a Christian house church in Henan Province, were arrested in Sanmenxia City, Henan Province, on September 28 and October 2, respectively. 	<p>Voice of America website; Oct. 6, 2005 and Oct. 19, 2005</p>
Oct. 2005	<p>On October 10, 2005, fifty-one leaders of underground churches in over twenty provinces and cities were surrounded by over seventy police officers during a meeting in Gouge Village, Hebei Province. The public security officers restricted their freedom</p>	<p>Radio Free Asia; Apr. 28, 2005</p>

	for twenty-four hours, during which they also confiscated their property.	
Nov. 2005	<p>On November 5, 2005, local public security officers and Bureau of Religious Affairs officials stormed a congregation of more than 150 members of a house church in Nantan Village, Wuyang County, Henan Province and took away six church members. Four were released that night and the other two, Yuan Quansan and Guang Wei, were detained for five days and three days, respectively.</p> <p>On November 7, 2005, 40 year old Father Li Suchuan and 35 year old Father Yang Menger of the Catholic Zhengding Diocese in Hebei Province were taken into custody by public security officers in Zhoujia Village and Zhoutou Village, Hebei, respectively, and held in Jinzhou City. They were released the day after U.S. President George W. Bush's Beijing visit.</p> <p>On November 8, 2005, 70 year-old Bishop Jia Zhiguo of the Catholic Zhengding Diocese in Hebei Province was taken away by public security officers, who ordered him to bring extra clothes with him. Jia was taken by the police car to Jinzhou City and transferred to Shijiazhuang City to attend classes. This was the eighth time that Jia had been arrested since January 2004.</p> <p>On November 18, 2005, six Catholic clergymen in the Zhengding Diocese in Hebei Province were arrested by the public security officers. They include 50 year old Wang Jinshan and Gao Lingshen, 60 year old Gao Xiuchi, 45 year old Zhang Yinhu, 36 year old Guo Zhijun, and 30 year old Peng Jianjun.</p> <p>On November 23, 2005, sixteen Franciscan nuns in Xi'an were attacked and beaten by about forty club-wielding thugs on the campus of the Rosary Middle School, resulting in the likely lifetime paralysis of 42 year old Sister Dong Gui and the loss of vision in one eye of 34 year old Sister Cheng</p>	<p>Radio Free Asia; Nov. 11, 2005</p> <p>AsiaNews (Italy); Nov. 29, 2005</p> <p>Voice of America website; Jan. 3, 2006</p>

	<p>Jingju. On November 30, 2005, Vatican spokesperson Joaquin Navarro-Valls issued a public statement denouncing the attacks and conveying concern. The statement stated that although the source of the attacks on the nuns was unclear, the use of violence against unarmed nuns is a cause of great distress and must be condemned.</p> <p>U.S. Christian rights organization China Aid Association announced that a survey report on religious persecution of house churches in Xinjiang Province (during the period of November 15 to 20, 2005) written by renowned Chinese human rights lawyer Gao Zhicheng, indicated that sixty-nine Christians were apprehended by the Chinese authorities for participating in a prayer meeting. The detention personnel made them pose for photos holding a piece of paper with their names along with a number. The police forced confessions from them by torture. One practitioner was forced to sit strapped to a "tiger bench" (a narrow iron bench used for torture) for thirty hours.</p>	
Dec. 2005 ~ Jan. 2006	<p>On December 12, 2005, about seventy members of Christian house churches in Anhui and Henan provinces met in Xincui County to discuss how to help people in Henan Province with AIDS. More than forty police officers in eight police cars surrounded the meeting place and took twenty-nine members back to the police station on the pretense that the assembly was illegal. The group's property was also confiscated. Twenty-seven of the persons were held for sixteen hours and the other two, who were pastors, were detained for twenty hours. The church property was never returned.</p> <p>On December 24, 2005, over one hundred police officers of the Public Security Bureau of Manasi County, Xinjiang Province, were dispatched on Christmas Eve to search for a local Christian house church, where nearly one hundred followers were celebrating Mass. The officers photographed all of the followers, including the children, and seized four</p>	<p>Radio Free Asia website; Dec. 14, 2005</p> <p>Radio Free Asia website; Jan. 26, 2006</p>

	<p>boxes of Bibles, 300 Christmas gifts, one hundred calendars, one electric organ, two cars and one cell phone belonging to the church followers. They took away twelve followers, among whom one was slapped on the face and was in handcuffs. Seven of the detainees were released the same day, and five were held for fifteen days until their release on January 8, 2006.</p>	
Feb. 2006	<p>Father Wang Wenzhi of the underground Catholic Church in Hebei Province has been under arrest since December 11, 2005 for refusing to join the state-controlled "Three-Self Patriotic Church" and has been subjected to brainwashing in an attempt to force him to join the official church.</p> <p>The Chinese authorities violently persecuted the freedom of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang Province. The main methods were to forbid religious participation and prayer by minors (under 18 years old). The Chinese authorities also required that the imams of mosques in Xinjiang Province report matters on Muslims that go to the mosque five times a day for prayer, including the numbers of worshippers, their age and gender, and whether or not they are the CPC members.</p>	<p>Radio Free Asia website; Jan. 6, 2006</p> <p>CNA; Feb. 2, 2006</p>
Feb. ~ Mar. 2006	<p>Xu Shuangfu, leader of the underground "Three Grade Servants Church," and sixteen other church responsible persons, were accused of killing or harming twenty members of another Christian house church, "Eastern Lightning," between 2002 and 2004. They were also accused of swindling over thirty-two million RMB. After a three-and-a-half-day trial, the Intermediate People's Court in Shuangyashan City, Heilongjiang Province, completed the first trial but did not immediately render judgment. In the courtroom, Xu repudiated his confession and denied guilt, saying he was coerced to confess guilt through extreme torture. U.S. religious group China Aid Association publicly disclosed the plea of Xu's defense lawyer on March 18, 2006, revealing the details of Xu's torture and bringing to light the ten tortures inflicted by the Chinese authorities to force a</p>	<p>Hong Kong Apple Daily: Mar. 19, 2006</p>

	confession.	
Apr. 2006	On April 26, 2006, numerous public security officers stormed the home of Christian house church Pastor Liu Yuhua in Linshu County, Shandong Province. Liu was placed under criminal detention under the charge of engaging in illegal business practices.	Voice of America website; May 17, 2006
May 2006	On May 10, 2006, police in Suqian City, Jiangsu Province, arrested eleven people at a house church congregation, including eight local workers, one Korean pastor, and two translators. After extensive interrogation, all of the detainees were released that night and the Korean pastor was forced to leave China on May 13, 2006.	Voice of America website; May 17, 2006