

## China's Rising Threats to Global Free Speech and Religious Freedom

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Religious freedom is under attack worldwide. Yet the Chinese government has been an increasing threat to religious freedom and free speech beyond its borders. For decades, the CCP's violation of human rights and free speech has transcended borders, from visa denial, media infiltration, and cyberattacks to physical attacks on activists and abduction of foreign citizens.

### I. Case Studies

#### 1. Visa denial and Expulsion

Foreigners who are critical of Beijing can be expelled before their visas expire. In 2012, after five-year reporting, filing 400 stories from China, reporter Melissa Chan was expelled. Two years later, the Chinese government refused Melissa Chan's routine visa-renewal request after five years of consistent reporting of human rights in China.<sup>15</sup> This sudden denial not only hinders Chan's ability to complete her work but also makes it difficult for journalists alike to feel secure in their role as news reporters. A French journalist and sinologist, Ursula Gauthier, faced intimidation by abusive comments from social media users in China and was eventually expelled in 2015 for her report about the treatment of Uyghurs. She was given a choice to either leave China before January 1, 2016, or apologize to "the people of China".<sup>16</sup> However, the CCP falsified Gauthier's article and its statements.<sup>17</sup> Her expulsion from China was "a scare tactic by the Chinese government to dissuade foreign journalists from criticizing Chinese policies, especially those involving Xinjiang, from within China."<sup>18</sup> Megha Rajagopalan, BuzzFeed's China bureau chief, was forced to leave China after her journalism visa application was denied.<sup>19</sup> Rajagopalan won the 2018 Human Rights Press Awards and the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for her feature reporting of the CCP's surveillance and atrocities in Xinjiang. In 2020, China reportedly expelled 17 foreign journalists and froze the credentials of several others.<sup>20</sup>

China expelled David Missal, a German student who studied in Beijing. The decision was linked to a documentary David was making about human rights lawyers for his master's program.<sup>21</sup> Elliot Sperling, a U.S. professor on Tibetan history at Indiana University, was dragged by border officials after landing in Beijing from New York for interrogation.<sup>22</sup> After this, he was put back on the plane to leave Beijing, despite carrying a valid one-year tourist visa. Sperling has spent time supporting Ilham Tohti, an ethnic Uyghur economics professor charged with separatism by Chinese authorities. Sperling's forced removal and interrogation signifies China's attempts to silence international advocates of individuals or groups that the Chinese government denounces. Banning a journalist or scholar from entering China after many years of studying Chinese and building a network in China causes extreme professional, social, and emotional suffering.

## 2. Disinvitation, Cancellation, and Censorship

In December 2014, the American Bar Association commissioned a book by academic lawyer Teng Biao entitled *Darkness Before Dawn*. The book aimed to convey Chinese politics and society through the raw and horrific stories of various human rights lawyers, including Teng Biao's maltreatment and imprisonment. On January 28, 2015, Teng received an email from ABA rescinding its offer to publish *Darkness Before Dawn* due to a "risk of upsetting the Chinese government."<sup>23</sup> In addition to attempting publication, Teng Biao has made efforts at various universities to discuss the rampant human rights violations across China. A scheduled talk between Teng Biao and Chinese civil rights activist Chen Guangcheng was canceled at Harvard in 2015.<sup>24</sup> In 2019, Teng tried to organize a panel discussion at Columbia University titled "Panopticism with Chinese Characteristics: Human Rights Violations by the Chinese Communist Party and How They Affect the World," but the discussion was canceled after receiving threats from the CSSA to protest against the event.<sup>25</sup>

In August 2022, Confucius Institutes at various universities in the United Kingdom began screening staff to ensure those hired have no political views or sentiments that might go against the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>26</sup> Sonia Zhang, a former Confucius Institute teacher at McMaster University, said she had to sign a contract that indicated that Falun Gong practitioners, like herself, were barred from the teaching post.<sup>27</sup> The Chinese Communist Party's primary tool of influence abroad comes with control over curriculum and hiring in overseas institutions that leave these schools vulnerable to censorship of important and wide-ranging discussion topics.

## 3. Informants and Spying

A study by the Wilson Center asserts that the PRC's influence and interference in activities in American higher education pose challenges to global academic freedom through overseas spying.<sup>28</sup> Chinese intelligence officers are monitoring campuses across the United States with online surveillance and an array of informants motivated by money, ambition, fear, or authentic patriotism. A comment in class about the Tiananmen massacre or a speech at a rally about Tibet can result in retaliation against students and their relatives back home.

In 2023 alone, VOA, a US international radio broadcaster, has interviewed at least five Chinese students studying in the US and Australia whose parents, who are civil servants or employees of state-owned enterprises in China, have received official threats from the Chinese government over remarks or actions by their children studying abroad.

## 4. Economic Coercion

The Chinese Communist Party's manipulative powers over global free speech have been tied to economic coercion—a threatened or actual imposition of economic costs by a state on a target

aiming to extract policy concession.<sup>29</sup> Many Western universities and think tanks are afraid of criticizing China because they benefit from the Chinese government directly or indirectly. Every year, Chinese students bring huge benefits to the United States. The economic impact of Chinese students in the U.S. was \$15.9 billion in 2019. Chinese students in the United Kingdom account for €1.7 billion in tuition fees yearly. The University of Glasgow has a 31% share of total tuition fees from Chinese students. After awarding an honorary doctorate to the Dalai Lama, the University of Calgary's accreditation was revoked by the Chinese government.<sup>30</sup> Beijing stopped government-funding programs at the University of California, San Diego, after the university invited the Dalai Lama to give a commencement speech in 2017.<sup>31</sup> In 2010, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to imprisoned dissident Liu Xiaobo. Although the Norwegian government was unable to influence the Nobel Committee's decision, the Chinese government quickly restricted imports of Norwegian salmon (once a complete ban) while raising trade restrictions on other Norwegian products. In 2010, 92% of China's salmon imports came from Norway, dropping to 29% by 2013.<sup>32</sup> There have been many such cases of economic coercion and they often worked.<sup>33</sup>

## 5. Sanctions

In March 2021, China's foreign ministry blacklisted ten European Union individuals and four entities in response to Brussels' sanctions against Chinese officials over the human rights abuses committed in Xinjiang.<sup>34</sup> The ministry released a statement stating that European Parliament individuals Reinhard Butikofer, Michael Gahler, Raphael Glucksmann, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, and Miriam Lexmann harmed China's sovereignty by spreading disinformation about the situation in Xinjiang. Sjoerd Wiemer Sjoerdsma, Samuel Cogolati, Dovile Sakaliene, Adrian Zenz, and Bjorn Jerden were also sanctioned by China and prohibited from entering the mainland, Hong Kong, and Macao of China and were restricted from business affairs with China.

In 2022, Beijing decided to sanction Todd Stein and Miles Yu Maochun, along with their close family members.<sup>35</sup> Stein has been deputy staff director at the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) since 2021 and Yu is a dissident and a professor who served as key China adviser under the former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. In addition, a U.S. library and a think tank were added to an increasingly long list of sanction and retaliation because they hosted meetings that angered Beijing.<sup>36</sup>

## 6. Lawfare

Lawfare is the use of legal systems and institutions to damage or delegitimize an opponent or to deter individual's expression of opinions. Lawsuits were used to target academics or others whose work illuminates China's human rights abuses. For example, companies from Xinjiang have—no doubt at state direction—filed a lawsuit in a Xinjiang court against researcher Adrian Zenz, one of the most outspoken scholars critical of the Uyghur genocide.<sup>37</sup> Due to his work and findings,

Zenz is encouraged to remain outside of China to evade being sued by companies in the Xinjiang region. This lawsuit and its threats directly hinder Zenz's ability to continue his research and academic development of reporting in Xinjiang.

Hong Kong's National Security Law (NSL) has created significant distress and threatened democratic freedoms for citizens abroad. The law has been used to target government opposition and highlights the unusual decision to apply the law beyond China's borders. Article 38 of the law states that individuals traveling to or transiting to Hong Kong, or flying on Hong Kong airlines, could be arbitrarily detained if they have said or done anything that might anger Beijing.<sup>38</sup> An example is Hong Kong national security police ordered Benedict Rogers, the founder of UK-based rights group Hong Kong Watch, to take down the group's website, accusing Rogers and the organization of violating the NSL.<sup>39</sup>

Safeguard Defenders first covered this threat in a recent report, "Pursued for Life", which exposes how Hong Kong is threatening to use all possible channels to seek the return of democracy activists under the NSL, and explored it further in "No Room To Run", a report on how China's use of INTERPOL has expanded since Xi Jinping came to power, and how it has evolved alongside China's growing long-arm policing overseas.<sup>40</sup> Hong Kong authorities had issued arrest warrants for Samuel Chu who has lived in the US as an American citizen for more than two decades.<sup>41</sup>

## **7. Interruption, Humiliation, and Intimidation**

Cases of interruption by Chinese students and officials have become a slow-growing threat to academic freedom. Uyghurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong practitioners, and other marginalized groups with ties to China face intimidation, state surveillance, and threats to their family members in China when they speak out on international campuses about oppression by the Chinese government. Rukiya Turdush, a Uyghur-Canadian activist, was interrupted by a shouting Chinese student when speaking at McMaster University.<sup>42</sup> Turdush reported that a Chinese student in the audience was filming her speech as she displayed satellite photos and academic sources displaying the mass incarceration of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Shortly after the event, the university's CSSA issued a statement decrying the talk as separatist and promoting ethnic hatred.

Vicky Xu, a journalist and researcher working in Australia, faced immense harassment campaigned by Chinese authorities in the form of death threats and rape threats.<sup>43</sup> Xu is the lead author of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute report "Uyghurs for Sale" and her work researches and condemns China's treatment of Uyghurs and its "re-education" campaigns that have been known to engage in forced labor practices. After working with and attending conferences hosted by La Trobe University in Australia, Xu was verbally harassed and her work's credibility was publicly questioned by a pro-CCP attendant.<sup>44</sup> For her work, Xu was called a slut, a traitor and a demon on Twitter. A 2021 report in the Global Times, a CCP mouthpiece, called her a "morally low person".<sup>45</sup> The level of harassment and intimidation these attendants commit towards pro-democracy activists

in China seems to aim to make institutions across the world fear disruption and freedom of anti-CCP expression, making them hesitant to invite professors, journalists, researchers, and analysts like Vicky Xu and Anne-Marie Brady to speak.

Wu Xiaolei, a student at Berklee College of Music, sent a series of threatening messages to another student who posted fliers calling for freedom and democracy on social media. In one message, Wu wrote: “Post more, I will chop your bastard hands off.” Wu threatened the victim and his family with information that Wu had been in contact with law enforcement in China about the fliers and that they would “greet” the victim’s family there.<sup>46</sup>

Yutong Su, a journalist and writer residing in Germany, had worked at a domestic radio station in China. In 2010, she fled China after police raided her home for publicly disclosing Li Peng's diary. Su has received various forms of harassment from unknown men showing up at her Berlin apartment, being threatened with doctored nude photographs and forged receipts from adult stores, and bomb threats tied to reservations under Su’s name at hotels in Berlin, Houston, and Hong Kong that she didn’t make. After she attended an event to commemorate the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, Su received numerous name-calling, death threats, and other forms of harassment.<sup>47</sup> Those who harassed Yutong Su told her that they supported the CCP government and warned her not to criticize the Beijing government or report negative news about it. Recently, the harassment against her has intensified. Along with other female journalists who have shared similar experiences, Yutong Su found evidences of the Chinese government’s support behind the harassment.<sup>48</sup>

A model statue went viral early March 2023 on social media of American scholar Miles Yu kneeling in Cultural Revolution style with a sign on his neck stating that he is the modern Qin Hui and a traitor to his Chinese ancestors and his country of birth.<sup>49</sup> The name Qin Hui is synonymous with treason in China and therefore reference to his name encourages beatings and public humiliation of other dissidents. This image signals to Chinese historians worldwide that beating and public humiliation will be anticipated if any reference is made to the Cultural Revolution or opposes the Chinese government.

## **8. Break-in, Theft, and Sabotage**

Professor Anne-Marie Brady at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, after writing a prominent report on China’s political interference, encountered theft of her computer from her home in February 2018 and her car tires deflated in November later that month.<sup>50</sup> Her work condemned the presence of Confucius Institutes in New Zealand universities, which have long been known to market the Chinese government’s propaganda schemes. Her colleagues in China were taken in for questioning. Her family car was tampered with, she received a threatening letter (“You are the next”), and answered numerous, anonymous phone calls in the middle of the night, despite having an unlisted number. The latest came at three o’clock in the morning on the day her family

returned home after a Christmas break.<sup>51</sup>

## **9. Hostage and Collective Punishment**

The CCP's "hostage diplomacy" can be traced back to 1960s, and the most famous case might be the detention of two Canadians, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, in retaliation to the arrest of Huawei's CFO, Meng Wanzhou. An Australian journalist Cheng Lei and writer Yang Hengjun were two of many other examples.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, collective punishment—a means to inflict pain to the family, relatives, friends or neighbors, etc, of targeted individuals—has a long history in China, and has been used by the Chinese authorities to penalize or silence critics domestically and internationally.

Dolkun Isa, who fled China in 1994 and now heads the Munich-based World Uyghur Congress, has been unable to contact family members inside China for years.<sup>53</sup> In 2019 he learned that his 79-year-old mother, Ayhan Memet, died in a "political reeducation" camp. He only learned about the death of his father, Isa Memet, 86, when it was reported on China state media in 2022. In 2023, Isa learned that his brother, Hushtar Isa, who has been arbitrarily detained since 2017, is now serving a life sentence on terrorism-related charges. Family members of six Radio Free Asia Uyghur Service reporters in the U.S. who reported and documented atrocities in the Uyghur area committed by the CCP have been detained in concentration camps.<sup>54</sup>

## **10. Physical Attacks**

A more extreme form of silencing academic discourse is through physical attack. Falun Gong practitioner and human rights advocate Peter Yuan Li was assaulted and robbed in his Atlanta home.<sup>55</sup> The men beat him severely after attempting to suffocate him. The men who spoke in Mandarin overturned his file cabinets and stole two laptop computers. The wounds on his face required fifteen stitches. This incident was a deliberate attempt to intimidate him and undermine Li's work against human rights violations in China.

A recent Cornell graduate student Kinen Kao was attacked in June 2022 while putting up pro-democracy posters on campus. His post on social media read: "I was assaulted by a man in the Ithaca Commons, who tore down my Free Hong Kong and Free Uyghurs posters before pushing me to the floor, leaving wounds on my left hand."<sup>56</sup> This case example directly references the danger Chinese students face when attempting to engage in free speech and academic discourse on college campuses. When students are unable to discuss current event and political issues on a college campus, the university violates its pledge to allow its students to freely pursue and engage in academic discourse.

## **11. Criminal Detention**

In 1999, Song Yongyi, a librarian and researcher at UCLA, went back to China to collect documents related to the Cultural Revolution, but when he arrived, he was detained for more than 100 days by the Chinese government for “stealing state secrets” when in reality, his goal was to pursue academic research.<sup>57</sup>

In July 2019, Luo Daiqing, a Chinese student at the University of Minnesota, was arrested in China and sentenced to six months in prison for tweets he posted while in the United States.<sup>58</sup> Luo tweeted an image of Lawrence Limburger, a cartoon villain, superimposed with Chinese government slogans. The case not only represents a dramatic escalation of the Chinese government’s attempts to shut down free speech abroad, but the arrest, by hindering Luo’s ability to pursue his education and return to university, directly threatens his ability to engage in academic discourse and learning. The arrest further sends a message to Chinese students to remain silent in discussing or distributing images of Chinese government officials that may be deemed critical of the regime. Due to China’s extreme and far-reaching surveillance measures, students are often even reluctant to attend pro-democracy campus events for fear of the Chinese government finding out.

Hong Kong publisher Yao Wentian received a ten-year jail sentence prior to the release of his book that criticized Chinese President Xi Jinping. The court ruled that he was guilty of “smuggling ordinary goods” from Hong Kong and Shenzhen since 2010; however, there is great speculation that the true reasoning behind his sentencing was his upcoming publication.<sup>59</sup> Despite Hong Kong residents having the civil liberty of freedom of expression, the Chinese government overstepped its authority and abused Wentian’s rights to preserve Xi Jinping and his party’s image.

## 12. Abduction

The kidnapping of Gui Minhai symbolizes China’s determination to smother criticism from abroad and encroach upon the fundamental freedom of academic study and free speech. Minhai was born in China in 1964 and was naturalized as a Swedish citizen in 1989. He is a poet, publisher, and distributor of books specializing in mainland Chinese politics and the lives of Chinese politicians. On October 17, 2015, Gui was kidnapped from his own apartment in Pattaya, Thailand, by Chinese secret agents. The Chinese government had been silent about holding him in custody for three months, at which point a controversial video confession was broadcast on mainland media.<sup>60</sup>

On February 25, 2020, Gui was sentenced to ten years imprisonment and five years’ deprivation of “political rights” by Ningbo Intermediate People’s Court in Zhejiang Province.<sup>61</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Mighty Current Media was targeted as a warning to the entire Hong Kong publishing industry to stop selling books that Chinese authorities deemed “forbidden” in China. Sadly, Gui is not the only bookseller taken away by China. What is publicly known is that four other booksellers have disappeared in 2015 in what is known as the “Causeway Bay Books Disappearances”: Lui Po, Cheung Chi-ping, Lam Wing-kee, and Lee Bo.<sup>62</sup> China’s abductions of the Causeway Bay booksellers demonstrate a blatant disregard for established principles of international law and

human rights. Information about the circumstances of the booksellers' disappearances and their treatment while in detention is still incomplete and will be until the Chinese government provides an explanation. These disappearances highlight the far-reaching legal and political repercussions of China's decision to carry out extra-judicial and extra-territorial operations.

### **13. Torture**

As described throughout the chapter thus far, various forms of torture have been utilized by the Chinese government. Within China, torture is rampant among various groups given the country's lack of judicial independence, party competition, and free press.<sup>63</sup> Torture is institutionalized and the torturers can usually get impunity, especially in political cases. The above-mentioned intellectuals who were detained in China all experienced torture to a different extent. Gui Minhai's torture was so brutal that he "refused" international support and "gave up" his Swedish citizenship.

### **14. Assassination and Murder**

It is not rare that Chinese intellectuals, especially dissidents and activists, died in custody or soon after being released. The names of some intellectuals include Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, Cao Shunli, Peng Ming, Yang Tianshui, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, prominent Uyghur religious scholar Muhammad Salih Hajim<sup>64</sup> and Abdulehed Mehsum<sup>65</sup>, among others. In a January 2019 update on interned, imprisoned, and disappeared intellectuals, UHRP reported that since 2017, five individuals are known to have died in custody or soon after their release. These individuals include religious scholars Muhammad Salih Hajim and Abdulnehed Mehsum; and students Abdusalam Mamat, Yasinjan, and Mutellip Nurmehmet. A sixth intellectual, Erkinjan Abdukerim, a teacher from Awat Township near Kashgar, died on September 30, 2018, shortly after his release from an internment camp.<sup>66</sup> In addition, Mihriay Erkin died in 2021 while arbitrarily held in Kashgar Yanbulak prison. Mihriay was a Uyghur intellectual lured back to China during China's regime's ongoing campaign to target prominent Uyghur scholars and activists in the diaspora who challenge their genocide.<sup>67</sup>

## **II. The Spectrum and Chinese Institutions That Threaten Religious Freedom and Free Speech**





The spectrum of the Chinese Communist Party's threat to global free speech falls into categories

that include but are not limited to infiltration of media and disinformation, visadenial, protest against academic events or free speech, economic coercion, governmental sanctions,lawfare, frivolous lawsuits, collective punishment, defamation, harassment and intimidation, physical assault, criminal detention and conviction, and abductions. These activities are primarily performed by the Chinese government, but can also be threatened by Chinese media platforms, Confucius Institute, CSSA, UFWD, and secret agents. The harm these activities pose to academic freedom can be measured on a 1-5 scale: one being a minimal threat and five being extreme. The most threatening activities to academic freedom and expression are harassment, physical assault, criminal conviction, and forced abductions, but all actions performed by the CCP against free speech threaten global academic freedom.

Free speech is at risk from dubious party-state funding. The CCP operates Confucius Institutes worldwide; however, as of March 2023, there remain only 13 Confucius Institutes in the United States, with a total of 108 in the process of or are already closed.<sup>68</sup> While marketed as educational programs and centers that fund Chinese language, history, and culture courses, CIs, in reality, are vehicles of the Chinese government’s propaganda schemes. CIs are backed by “Hanban” or “Confucius Institutes Headquarters,” funded by the Chinese government’s Ministry of Education. Notably, these institutions are also funded by the CCP’s Propaganda Department, an extension of the CCP’s “United Front Work Department”, which is a government agency dedicated to influence operations and propaganda campaigns both domestically and abroad.<sup>69</sup> The methods seek to influence overseas Chinese communities, foreign governments, and other actors to take action in support of CCP politics. Confucius Institutes have harmed academic freedom globally by selecting and training teachers, course materials, brainwashing lectures, and preventing sensitive speakers from being invited and sensitive topics from being discussed.<sup>70</sup> As of July 2, 2021, there are still more than a dozen Confucius Institutes operating in host schools and universities across the United States.<sup>71</sup> Many Confucius Institutes have closed, but they maintain operation under new covers.

Rising self-censorship is also related to fears of nationalistic Chinese students recording and reporting on class discussions.<sup>72</sup> China’s “Great Firewall” and The Golden Shield Project aim to monitor and censor what can and cannot be seen through an online network in China.<sup>73</sup> Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSA), which claim to be “student-run organizations”, has formal links with the Chinese embassy and consulates, including funding support and organizing pro-Communist Party political gatherings on university campuses. UFWD, United Front Work Department, one of the major CCP departments, has been dedicated to influence operations and propaganda campaigns around the globe since the time of Mao Zedong. China has *employed the*  


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 UFWD and various organizations under its umbrella work to advance China’s global propaganda schemes and smother criticism from abroad. The Chinese government has grown bolder in trying to shape global perceptions of the country on foreign university campuses, influence academic discussions, monitor students from China, censor scholarly inquiry, or otherwise interfere with academic freedom. Chaoyin International School in Richmond, B.C. teachers were told to “tread lightly” on issues related to the Chinese Communist Party, Tiananmen Square, and the Dalai Lama. The school strictly follows the Chinese curriculum,

which means the Chinese government funds and provides “culture and language training” using textbooks and other educational materials vetted by the CCP.”<sup>74</sup> While the website clearly states an encouragement for students “to develop an independent and confident attitude towards learning, as well as a positive and responsible attitude towards life,” learning in an environment that censors facts and spoon feeds propaganda by the Chinese government leaves no room for a healthy learning environment nor fostering of free discourse.<sup>75</sup> In Australia’s universities, it has become a habit for Chinese pro-democracy students to self-censor their speech to not only avoid threats and harassment from classmates but also to safeguard against being reported to authorities in China.<sup>76</sup> The University of California, San Diego was prompted by the CSSA to refrain from referring to the Dalai Lama as a “spiritual leader” or “inexile.” After the Dalai Lama was told to deliver a commencement address to the University in 2017, Chinese students and members of UCSD’s CSSA staged a demonstration to protest his attendance. The protesters’ disapproval of the Dalai Lama, however, should have had no impact on his presence considering his widely influential role as a global leader in Buddhist teachings. The UCSD case illuminates the far-reaching measures Chinese government-funded organizations have on the international community’s ability to engage in free speech and intellectual understanding. In short, their measures hinder global academic freedom.

Safeguard Defenders released an investigative report monitoring China’s growing global transnational repression schemes. As of 2022, China has established 54 illegal policing stations across five continents.<sup>77</sup> Roughly 230,000 Chinese fugitives have been persuaded to return to China to face potential criminal charges for actions that go against the regime. Tools of persuasion include denying the target’s children in China the fundamental right to education. These policing operations often use local “Chinese Overseas Home Associations” linked to the CCP’s United Front Work: “Abandoning any pretext of due process or the consideration of suspects’ innocence until proven guilty, targeting suspects’ children and relatives in China as ‘guilty by association’ or ‘collateral damage,’ and using threats and intimidation to target suspects abroad, is now becoming an endemic problem.”

Number	Activities	Actors	Level of threat	Frequency
1	Disinformation, Propaganda	Chinese companies, Chinese media, UFWD, Confucius Institute, CSSA	1	always
2	Visa Denial	Chinese government, Chinese embassy/consulates	1	Sometimes
3	Expulsion	Chinese government, Chinese embassy/consulates	2	sometimes

4	Disinvitation, Cancellation, Censorship	Confucius Institute, CSSA, Chinese embassy/consulates, UFWD	2	often
5	Informants, Spying	CCP, Secret agents, pro-CCP students, UFWD, Confucius Institute, CSSA	3	always
6	Economic Coercion	Chinese government/CCP	3	often
7	Sanctions	Chinese government/CCP	3	sometimes
8	Lawfare	Chinese legislators, Chinese government	3	sometimes
9	Interruption, Humiliation, Intimidation	Chinese media, UFWD, Secret agents, pro-CCP students, Confucius Institute, CSSA	4	often
10	Break-in, Theft, Sabotage	UFWD, Secret agents, CCP-hired thugs	4	rarely
11	Hostage-taking, Collective Punishment	CCP, Secret agents, Law enforcement officers	5	sometimes
12	Physical Attacks	UFWD, Secret agents, CCP-hired thugs	5	sometimes
13	Criminal Detention	Chinese government, Law enforcement officers	6	sometimes

14	Abduction	CCP, Secret agents	6	rarely
15	Torture	Chinese government, Law enforcement officers, Secret police	6	often
16	Assassination, Murder	CCP, Chinese government, Secret agents	7	rarely

### III. Negative Impacts of China's Threat to Free Speech and Religious Freedom

Countless scholars, journalists, authors, students, and family members have begun to practice self-censorship as a means to avoid potential troubles with the Chinese government. China Index

found instances of self-censorship among German institutes and forms of pushback from the PRC side against research organizations and scholars whose work does not align with Beijing's efforts.<sup>78</sup>

Even in Western countries that enjoy the freedoms of information and expression, individuals misunderstand China's influence operations and politics, and some do not realize the extent to which China has infiltrated not only their academic lives but in their every day. China's propagandaschemes depend on distributing misinformation. During the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, had the Chinese government exposed the severity of the outbreak and did not punish journalists who sought to spread accurate information, it is likely that Covid-19 would not have turned into a pandemic.

In terms of academic freedom, students studying in China and abroad have chosen to self-censor their voices in fear of the Chinese government. When college campuses invite speakers like the Dalai Lama or activists like Teng Biao to speak of China's human rights violations, Chinese students are often reluctant to attend for consternation that the Chinese government will revoke their visas. As articulated in the previous pages, scholars, journalists, students, and more have become increasingly cautious about voice opposition, and undertaking research, and in some cases, Western scholars have become apologetic towards China and have been coerced into endorsing the Party.

U.S. law enforcement agencies have struggled to respond because much of the censorship and harassment occurs in a legal gray area. Victims are often frightened or do not believe anyone can assist them. University administrators are not always eager to intercede because this would involve risking a lucrative financial stream. According to the Department of Education, since 2013 U.S. universities have received more than \$1 billion from mainland China from various individuals, companies, and government organizations. This number does not reflect the tuition

Chinese students pay to attend U.S. universities, of which roughly 370,000 Chinese students have come to attend their universities in 2019.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the complexities of free speech and identity politics make administrators even more reluctant to confront Chinese state influence.

Beijing's manifold methods have created other harms in addition to self-censorship: personal reputation, career interruption, profession shift, financial loss, mental and physical pain, personal freedom, the suffering of family or relatives, deprivation of citizenship, and in extreme cases, the loss of lives of the targets and/or their loved ones.

#### **IV. Recommendations**

It is imperative international institutions are made aware of China's international human rights violations and prevent further complicity in China's overseas suppression. When human rights atrocities occur, the world must speak out publicly on behalf of the victims. All relevant stakeholders, including public and private donors, should redouble their efforts to protect and defend civil society and independent media from attempts by China and others to stifle and repress their important human rights monitoring work. In coordination with the United Front Work, journalists and activists have routinely coordinated with the Chinese government to suppress free speech and harass, intimidate, and surveil Chinese student activists on university campuses (pg 10).<sup>82</sup> To effectively counter CCP influence operations on education, continued research and investigation are needed to further bring to light the activities of the United Front, its role in the CCP, how it operates, and its links to other important CCP organs.

The Chinese Communist Party's desire to interfere with global free speech religious freedom is motivated by attempts to silence critics, cover up truths that harm the regime, shape a new international narrative, produce an environment that fosters safety for the regime and avoids challenges to China's political legitimacy. China operates its sprawling system of transnational repression by working through the legal and political systems of foreign countries—including detentions, extraditions, and joint border patrols—and often using diplomatic staff at embassies and consulates, run through China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Transnational repression exists as a part of a wider trend of global authoritarianism that threatens to erode democratic norms worldwide. China's global campaign of repression and harassment—both physical and mental—of individuals living abroad has shifted from Central Asia to Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and the rest of the map. The numerous cases of forced detention, and threats to freedom of expression and safety breach fundamental rights and basic personal freedoms. Yet, China remains one of the world's most influential countries, and because of this, few on the international stage are willing to speak out about the PRC's repression and internment of individuals and communities around the world.