

About China Voices

Welcome to China Voices, a CSW quarterly update on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in China. All cases cited have either been published publicly or reported through CSW sources. For feedback or for further information, please contact:

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Overview

China 14th National People's Congress (NPC) concluded on 11 March. The [report](#) by Voice of America (VoA), the United States' global media agency, suggested that the lack of oppositions during the week-long deliberations demonstrated not only China's "rubber stamp" style of fake democracy, but also the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) "knife handle" i.e.. the forceful wielding of its authority to maintain stability.

In the wider arena, a number of dramatic events took place during this quarter, largely due to Trump's executive orders. Of particular relevance to human rights issues were [the significant cuts to foreign aid](#) and the [dismantling of the Agency for Global Media](#). The stoppage of the National Endowment for Democracy (N.E.D.) funds affects groups all over the world, but activists say the impact on groups focused on China will be especially severe, according to [The New York Times](#). Groups highlighted include China Digital Times, the World Uyghur Congress and China Labor Watch.

In the mean time, Vice President J.D. Vance's [vowed to defend religious freedom](#) on 5 February, on the third day of the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit. During his speech, he highlighted his concerns about the repression of religious groups in China. He emphasised that religious freedom remains a central pillar of American identity and a guiding principle of the administration.

China is in the spotlight of [Transnational repression \(TNR\)](#), being the world's leading perpetrator,

responsible for 22 percent of all of the incidents recorded between 2014 and 2024, according to a [Freedom House findings](#) published on 6 February.

The Federal Council of Switzerland has adopted a [report](#), drawn from a study commissioned by the Federal Office of Justice and the State Secretariat for Migration, which found that Tibetans and Uyghurs living in Switzerland are subjected to TNR and are likely to be pressured by actors in China to spy on people in their community. The report analyses current efforts made by Swiss authorities in tackling TNR and provides a series of recommendations.

On 24 January 2025, the UK's Joint Committee for Human Rights chaired by Lord Alton issued a call for Evidence for a [new inquiry into TNR in the UK](#), with 24 February 2025 as the deadline for submission. The aim of the inquiry is to gain deeper understanding of what TNR looks like, who the perpetrators are, the target communities and how it impacts the communities. It also seeks to informally assess how effective the UK legislations and the relevant authorities are in supporting the target communities. A group of human rights civil societies have jointly made the submission.

A group of UN Special Procedures sent a [letter](#) to China in November 2024 concerning "recurring patterns of repression, including incommunicado detention and enforced disappearance, aimed at restricting artistic, cultural and religious expressions, and silencing human rights defenders and dissenting or opposing views critical of the Government" that involved 19 individuals, including Xie Yang, Huang Xueqin, Wang Jianbing, Zhang Zhan, Ilham Tohti, Gulshan Abbas, Gui Minhai, Lu Siwei and several other Tibetan and Uyghur individuals. China [responded](#) in January 2025, denying the allegations.

There was grave concern about the proposed China "mega-embassy" in London. The first [protest](#) took place on 8 February, followed by a [second protest](#) on 15 March. The protest was attended by Hong Kong rights groups, Tibetans, Uyghurs and some local residents. The [main motivation](#) for the protest was

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the fear that the mega-embassy would serve as a tool for TNR.

The Chair and the co-Chair of the United States Congressional Executive Commission on China [wrote](#) to the UK Ambassador to the US, Lord Peter Mandelson, on 26 February, to convey their concerns to Prime Minister Keir Starmer before he met with President Trump on 27 February with regards to this matter.

On 19 March, on the first anniversary of the implementation of Article 23 of the Basic Law in Hong Kong, Hong Kong Labour Rights Monitor, alongside 19 other Hong Kong organisations in the UK, [joined forces to launch and co-sign a petition](#) calling on the UK government to take action to address the issue of TNR and ensure the safety of the Hong Kong community in the UK.

Within China, the Chinese Community Party (CCP) has brought in a new measure, ["Measures for the Suppression of Illegal Social Organisations"](#), formulated by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. They come into force on 1 May. Article 3 specifically spells out that organisations carrying out activities without registration would be deemed illegal. One will have to pay attention to what takes place among the unregistered religious groups and their gatherings after the 1 May.

The Chinese government has used the charge “illegal gatherings” extensively to detain and prosecute religious leaders of unregistered religious groups for years. These new measures are effectively pushing the religious groups to decide between succumbing to Party Supremacy or being closed and their leaders put in prisons.

In positive news, the artist-turned-citizen journalist, [Li Ying](#), who is behind the X account ["Teacher Li is not Your Teacher \(@whyyoutouzhele\)"](#) who shot to prominence during the [White paper protest](#) in November 2022, was nominated for Noble Prize by the bipartisan leaders of the US Congressional Special Commission on China on 6 February 2025,

among two other nominees. Li Ying gave a moving [statement on X](#), saying “....I hope this nomination can draw the world’s attention to freedom of media and speech problems facing one-fifth of the world’s population..... I want to show people that even ordinary people can have the courage to shake the most powerful dictator in the world”.

Part 1 – Law & Policy

[Declaration to create China as a "modern socialist country" by 2035](#)

On 30 January 2025, [France’s Institut Montaigne](#) published an analysis of the declaration, highlighting that making national security an unyielding focus is part of CCP’s pursuit of the goal of achieving “socialist modernisation”.

Part 2 – Cyber Security & Surveillance

■ [China's launch of DeepSeekR1 AI that shook the world](#)

Launched early this year, the powerful new open-source artificial intelligence model developed on a seemingly tiny budget by Chinese startup DeepSeek has shaken the world. Along with talk of an impending upheaval in the tech industry, there are serious concerns that the Chinese government is using it for its propaganda in ["guiding public opinion"](#), one of the ["Three Warfares"](#) which is at the heart of the CCP’s strategy.

■ [Proposed new regulations by Cyberspace Administration of China \(CAC\)](#)

In January 2025, Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) issued two new regulations for public consultation, one on [Cross-Border Data Transfers – New Measures for PIP Certification](#), another on [New MCN Rules - China Media Project](#). Consultation closed on 3 and 9 February respectively.

Part 3 – Key Cases on Transnational Repression

■ Lawfare - Use of law as a weapon for repression

Ma Ju, a Hui Muslim human rights defender based in the US, was pursued by CCP under the US courts. Ma had earlier presented a groundbreaking report at the United Nations (UN) on China's suppression of its Hui Muslim minority; testified on Capitol Hill and in Geneva; and helped organise protests against CCP's demolition of mosques in Yunnan province.

The CCP has extended "lawfare", one of the ["Three Warfares"](#) beyond its borders. *"Pursuing dissidents overseas through common litigation is a new form of suppression and worthy of our attention"*, said a scholar in the [article published by RFA](#).

■ Hong Kong: six exiled democracy activists pursued under National Security Law police

Following the [sentencing of the 45 pro-democracy campaigners for subversion](#) on 19 November 2024, Hong Kong's national security police issued a fresh round of arrest warrants on 24 December for six people living overseas, including in the UK, with bounties worth HK\$1 million offered for information leading to their arrests.

The repression on the pro-democracy campaigners was relentless, with Hong Kong police taking into questions [ex-pollster, Chung Kim-Wah's wife and son](#) on 14 January, [ex-district councillor Carmen Lau's uncle and aunt](#), on 10 February, and [ex-convenor of the disbanded Studentlocalism, Tony Chung's stepfather](#) on 18 March.

■ 40 Uyghurs deported from Thailand back to China

A group of 40 Uyghur men detained in Thailand for more than a decade were deported to China in the early hours of 27 February amid global outcry. AP News outlines [the Thai officials secret plan](#) for the deportation despite their repeated public denials.

Thailand does not recognize the status of refugees or asylum seekers and has signed neither the UN Refugee Convention nor the 1967 protocol. Uyghurs are subject to especially harsh restrictions because Thailand's government has classified their detention as a matter of national security.

Part 4 – Alleged "crime" against religious groups and leaders

■ Mass arrests and prosecution of house church leaders in Tibet

On Christmas Day, 25 December 2024, a prosecutor's office in the Tibet Autonomous Region filed criminal charges against 10 Christians from the Chinese house church "All Ranges Church." This is the latest case in a nationwide crackdown against this banned Christian group.

■ Crime of "cult" or "engaging with cult activities"

On 10 March, Maizhong Reformed Church in Fuyang, Anhui province, was [raided](#) again and its leader, Elder Chang Shun detained for the third time in six months, together with eight other believers. Elder Chang had participated in signing the "Joint Statement: A Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith" by Pastor Wang Yi of Chengdu Early Rain Covenant Church in 2018, openly refusing to join the Three-Self Church.

On the same day, Wheatseed Reform Church, another unregistered church, also in Fuyang, Anhui, and which has refused to join the Three Self Church, was [raided and two Christians detained](#) accused of "using cult activities to endanger society,"

However, being a member of the Three-Self Church does not guarantee freedom from intervention from the public security organs. On 5 March, Xinyi Village Church in Huainan, Anhui, a member of the Three-Self Church, was [raided](#), with nine members detained. Four members including pastor Zhao Hongliang, were under "criminal detention" while the remaining five were released on bail.

■ **Crime of “illegal crossing border”**

On 15 January 2025, a prayer request was posted on X, for [Pastor Sun Chenghao](#), a Korean pastor with Chinese citizenship, who was detained on 15 December 2023 on the alleged charge of "organizing others to sneak across the border," after returning from a sightseeing trip to Jeju Island in South Korea.

A [Hui Muslim tour operator](#) has also been charged on the same ground, being accused of organising illegal Hajj pilgrimage, and assisting others to “illegal crossing border”.

■ **Crime of 'organising illegal gatherings'**

Another Hui, a Christian pastor from Yunnan Province, was charged and tried on 10 February for ‘organising illegal gatherings’ in relation to a gathering of no more than ten Christians in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. He was sentenced to nine months in prison by the Yinchuan Railway Transportation Court in on 24 March.

More information about Hui can be found in [The Repression of FoRB in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region](#)

Part 4 – Human Right Defenders

■ **Update on Zhang Zan: the hero journalist who broke key stories on COVID-19**

Christian human rights defender Zhang Zhan, who reported on Wuhan, then served four years in prison for ‘picking quarrels and provoking trouble” and released on the 13 May 2024, was re-detained in August 2024 for assisting a young democracy activist. She has been behind bars since. She [started her hunger strike](#) once again on 25 January 2025, and has been force-fed by the detention centre.

According to a [report by Asia News](#) published on 24 March, Zhang is expected to appear in court soon, again on trial for ‘picking quarrels and provoking trouble’ under Article 293 of the Penal Code for her defense of the right to FoRB, defending a colleague and human rights activist. The trial date is unknown.