



# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

**ZHANG ZHAN**





# **2025 REPORT ON GOVERNMENT PERSECUTION OF CHURCHES AND CHRISTIANS IN CHINA**



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CHINA AID ASSOCIATION (CHINAID)  
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INTRODUCTION.....	6
PART 1: SUMMARY .....	9
MAIN FINDINGS.....	9
IMPACTS OF POLICIES.....	10
PART 2: POLICY CASES AND ANALYSIS OF LAWS/REGULATIONS.....	12
PART 3: ANALYSIS OF RESTRICTIVE POLICY MEASURES.....	18
PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PERSECUTED IN CHINA.....	24
PART 4: ANALYSIS OF KEY CASES.....	29
PART 5: ANALYSIS OF TRENDS IN CHINA’S RELIGIOUS POLICY AND RESTRICTIONS.....	45
PART 6: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	50



**Preface:**

*"Lord, you have already known the desires of the humble; you will prepare their hearts and listen attentively to their prayers, to vindicate the orphans and the oppressed, so that the arrogant shall no longer intimidate them."*

— Adapted from the Chinese Union Version (CUV) Bible, Old Testament, **Psalms 10:17–28**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the People's Republic of China, state power and ruling party power are highly integrated, forming a governance structure often described as a “party-state unity.” Although the Constitution explicitly guarantees citizens the freedom of religious belief, in practice this constitutional right is not genuinely respected or protected. On the contrary, religious belief is increasingly constrained, reshaped, and systematically incorporated into a highly politicized framework within institutional design, policy implementation, and social governance.

This report provides a systematic review and analysis of the latest developments in China's religious freedom policies in 2025, along with related cases. It focuses on the enactment and revision of laws and regulations, central policy directives, and their local-level implementation mechanisms, while assessing the real-world impact of these policies on different religious communities. Special attention is given to Christian groups (both Catholic and Protestant), minority religious communities, and illustrative case studies, aiming to present the tangible human rights consequences of restricted religious freedom under these policies.

Our research finds that in 2025, China's religious governance has clearly shifted from a historically high-pressure, stability-focused model toward a highly institutionalized, technocratic, and normalized framework of control. Through the cumulative application of laws and regulations, religious activities that were previously non-political are now redefined as illegal or non-compliant. The law has ceased to function as a protector of religious freedom and has instead become a tool to weaken or even eliminate religious independence.

Within this process, the “Sinicization of religion” exhibits an evident political orientation in policy enforcement: religious doctrines, religious education, religious sites, clergy, and their public expressions are required to align closely with the political positions and ideology of the ruling party. Groups failing to meet these requirements face marginalization or outright suppression.


Of particular concern is the growing role of digital governance in religious management. Real-name registration, platform approvals, content monitoring, and data surveillance have been systematically introduced into the religious domain, greatly enhancing state visibility and control over religious activity, while profoundly affecting the privacy and expressive space of believers.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Moreover, under the pretext of preventing “foreign influence,” Chinese authorities have imposed strict restrictions on cross-border religious exchanges, theological resources, and funding flows. This has increasingly isolated religious communities in China from information, resources, and international connections, with effects extending to overseas students and diaspora communities.

The cases and data included in this report reflect only part of the situation. Due to limited transparency and security concerns, many occurrences remain unrecorded publicly. Yet these unreported phenomena themselves underscore the ongoing and structural challenges to religious freedom.

We issue this report to provide fact-based assessments and references for the international community, policymakers, and relevant multilateral mechanisms. We hope all stakeholders will continue to observe and carefully evaluate the development of China’s religious policies and their impact on fundamental rights with a constructive and long-term perspective.



**Founder and President of ChinaAid: Dr. Bob Fu**  
**December 17, 2025**

**PART ONE: EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**

## Part One: Executive Summary

**Time Frame:** This report primarily covers changes in religious freedom policies in the People's Republic of China in 2025, with a focus on laws and regulations, central and local policy implementation, and Christian communities (Catholic and Protestant). It also touches on minority ethnic religious groups and selected cases of individual democratic activists affected by control and restrictions.

### Key Findings:

- **Systematic suppression continues to deepen:** In 2025, China's religious policies have established a highly institutionalized and technocratic system of repression, particularly targeting underground Christian churches, house meeting points, and unregistered faith groups.
- **Illegalization under the "legal guise":** Through laws such as the Regulations on Religious Affairs, Administrative Measures for Religious Information Services, and the Anti-Espionage Law, ordinary religious activities are widely classified as "illegal," "infiltration," or "endangering national security."
- **"Sinicization of religion" shifts to "Party-ization of religion":** The state enforces comprehensive political reshaping of religious doctrines, sites, and personnel, forcing faith groups to "align with the Party"; those who fail face suppression or closure.
- **Technology as a new core tool of repression:** Real-name registration, platform approvals, content filtering, facial recognition, and big data tracking are fully deployed to monitor religious activity, resulting in systematic violations of believers' personal privacy.
- **Faith communities forced into isolation:** In the name of preventing "foreign anti-China influence," authorities block all cross-border religious contacts, theological resources, and funding channels, leaving Chinese churches isolated in terms of information, resources, and international support.

### Main Contents of Policy Restrictions:

- Strict approval systems for foreign religious activities in China, including limitations on locations, time, and hosts.
- Common religious activities (donations, Bible distribution, overseas training) redefined as potential criminal offenses or administrative violations.
- Political (loyalty and ideological) requirements incorporated into religious education, publishing, and clergy qualification.
- Increased oversight of religious sites and online platforms, including real-name registration, content review, and officially controlled "special service channels."

**Policy Impact Points:****1. Destructive restructuring of church ecology:**

- House churches cannot be legalized, forced underground, disbanded, or attached to the official “Three-Self Patriotic Church”; in some areas, they are directly placed under government street-level management (“management incorporation”).
- Underground Catholic bishops are absorbed and weakened; official personnel changes are imposed first, with the Vatican having to respond passively. Some historic dioceses led by underground bishops are merged under official bishops, a move aimed at strengthening Party-State control.
- Three-Self churches are heavily politicized, with administrative directives replacing preaching; theological education channels are blocked, raising the risk of generational interruption of independent pastors.

**2. High-pressure, fear-inducing environment for believers:**

- Believers labeled as “illegal assembly participants,” facing job loss or obstacles in children’s education; online evangelism nearly disappears, and digital outreach is restricted.
- Physical worship is monitored via technological means; in some areas, public employees and children are banned from attending churches, forcing collective worship to become individualized and secretive.

**3. Legalized elimination of religious freedom:**

- Legal systems no longer safeguard religious freedom but are used as tools to suppress faith; religious activities face “legally enforced restrictions,” forming a “procedural illegality.”
- The concept of freedom of belief is redefined by the government as “controlled subordinate freedom.”

**4. Isolation from international support networks:**

- Exchanges between overseas religious institutions and Chinese churches are blocked; support channels frozen, external resources limited.
- Chinese believers’ connections with the global faith community are systematically severed.

**Summary:**

In 2025, the Chinese government’s religious governance has shifted from a “high-pressure stability maintenance” model to one of “institutional reconstruction.” Through legal, technological, cultural, and international isolation mechanisms, religious control is embedded into the core of regime operations. This systemic suppression is not merely an attack on individual groups but a strategic reconfiguration and domestication of the entire religious ecosystem, aimed at completely eliminating the independence, public presence, and spiritual vitality of religion. The international community, policymakers, and faith groups must respond systematically and maintain long-term vigilance.

## **PART TWO: POLICY CASES AND ANALYSIS OF LAWS/REGULATIONS**

## Part Two: Policy Cases and Analysis of Laws/Regulations

China has already established an overlapping network of control through laws and regulations including the Regulations on Religious Affairs, Regulations on the Management of Religious Groups, Law on the Management of the Activities of Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations in China, Anti-Secession Law, National Security Law, Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services, Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel, Cybersecurity Law, and Regulations on the Administration of Internet Information Content, among others. In the digital era, religious expression has been almost entirely incorporated into areas that are monitorable and accountable by the state. These laws and regulations impose multiple restrictions on religious activity, such as approval systems, supervisory mechanisms, and ideological compliance requirements. Below are policies and regulations already in effect or publicly released in 2025, along with their concrete measures and underlying logic of restriction.

### 1. Implementation Rules and Regulations on Religious Activities of Foreigners in China

- **Announced:** March 31, 2025 | **Effective:** May 1, 2025
  - Core Provisions: Foreigners' religious activities in China must comply with Chinese laws; collective religious activities require registration at temples, churches, or approved temporary venues; approvals are required for preaching, publication dissemination, and religious exchanges; certain activities (self-organized venues, educational training, propaganda) are prohibited without authorization.
- **Specific Restrictions on Religious Freedom:**
  - Strict institutionalization and approval of foreign religious group activities
  - Heavy restrictions on religious exchanges, publications, and worship
  - Limiting the freedom of foreign religious personnel, including preaching and conducting rituals
  - Tight control over religious materials' quantity, usage, entry, and distribution
- **Potential Risks / Abuse:**
  - Ambiguous definitions may suppress foreign clergy activities disfavored by the government
  - Approval processes lack transparency and can be arbitrary
  - Normal religious activities of foreign believers or pastors may be refused

### 2. Measures for Religious School Teacher Qualification and Professional Title Evaluation & Academic Degree Awarding Measures for Religious Schools

- **Issued:** 2024; part of the Five-Year Plan for Sinicization of Christianity (2023–2027), still being implemented and reinforced in 2025.



- **Core Provisions:**
  - Establishes stricter conditions and procedures for teacher qualifications, professional title evaluations, and academic degree awards at religious schools.
  - Political and ideological review is incorporated into the evaluation standards.
- **Specific Restrictions on Religious Freedom:**
  - Raises political loyalty and ideological vetting thresholds.
  - Excludes teachers who do not meet Party-alignment or political standards.
  - Weakens the autonomy of religious education institutions in academic freedom and doctrinal content.
- **Potential Risks / Abuse:**
  - Evaluation standards are not transparent.
  - Local governments may use these measures for control or punitive purposes.
  - Teachers may be unfairly treated due to non-religious factors (e.g., government relations, personal background).

### 3. Speech by Wang Huning at the CCP Politburo Standing Committee Meeting on Religious Work

- **Issued:** January–February 2025
- **Core Provisions:**
  - Calls for “systematically advancing the Sinicization of religion” and “strict governance of religious work.”
  - Religious communities are required to strengthen the “Five Identifications” (motherland, Chinese nation, Chinese culture, Chinese Communist Party, socialism).
- **Specific Restrictions on Religious Freedom:**
  - Religious organizations and churches must align doctrine and belief with Party and state ideology.
  - Doctrine, rituals, and preaching content are reviewed and modified to conform to official perspectives.
  - Political loyalty of clergy and church leaders becomes a key evaluation criterion.
- **Potential Risks / Abuse:**
  - Religious doctrine, rituals, and expression may be compressed to an officially acceptable scope.
  - Some churches may be labeled as disloyal.
  - Churches may face varying levels of suppression depending on their degree of compliance.

#### 4. Digital and Online Governance Measures (e.g., Real-Name Registration, Audio Sermon Controls)

- **Reported:** May 2025, regarding implementation of real-name registration for church audio sermons on WeChat
- **Core Provisions:**
  - Believers must register with their real names before accessing church sermons or platform content.
  - Platforms must verify the identity of registered users.
  - Authorities can require content providers to sign contracts or agreements and assume legal responsibility.
- **Specific Restrictions on Religious Freedom:**
  - Limits anonymous access to religious content.
  - May result in exclusion, fear of surveillance, or tracking.
  - Online content is subject to censorship and removal.
- **Potential Risks / Abuse:**
  - Elderly or technically limited users may struggle to comply.
  - Real-name registration may be used for monitoring believers.
  - Churches may be held accountable for platform management or user behavior issues.

#### 5. Code of Conduct for Religious Personnel's Online Behavior

- **Issued:** September 7, 2025 by the National Religious Affairs Administration (Document No.: Guo Zong Fa [2025] 12)
- **Specific Restrictions on Religious Freedom:**
  - Religious personnel must “love the motherland, uphold the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, and support the socialist system” in their online activities.
  - Preaching, teaching, or religious training online is only allowed through legally established platforms (religious organizations, religious schools, temples/churches) that have obtained an *Internet Religious Information Service Permit*.
  - Private accounts, livestreaming platforms, and social media groups are restricted or prohibited for religious dissemination.
  - Online religious activities such as ceremonies, gatherings, prayers, scripture copying, or baptism may be considered violations.
  - Religious personnel may not transmit religious teachings to minors online or organize them for religious activities.
  - Sermons that involve politically sensitive topics, eschatology, or questions Party directives may result in revocation of qualifications, preaching restrictions, penalties, or detention.

## 5. Code of Conduct for Religious Personnel's Online Behavior

- **Potential Risks / Abuse:**

- Authorities may classify ambiguous statements or doctrinal interpretations as “heretical,” “extreme,” or “infiltrating.”
- Clergy may self-censor, avoid innovation, or refrain from teaching sensitive doctrines to avoid penalties or account suspension.
- Overseas clergy or religious organizations that provide religious materials, support, or sermons to believers in mainland China may face additional restrictions or legal accountability.

## 6. Draft of China's “*National Unity Law*”

The Draft of China's “*National Unity Law*” was submitted to the National People's Congress for review on September 8, 2025. There is no publicly available information showing that the law has been officially passed, promulgated, or come into effect. It is still in the legislative process.

### Core provisions or content:

- Promotes a unified consciousness in the fields of culture, education, and propaganda.
- The draft designates the national common language (Mandarin) as the dominant language and requires that if government documents are issued in minority languages, they must be accompanied by a Mandarin version.
- The draft requires that preschool children must begin learning Mandarin and “basically master” Mandarin by the end of compulsory education (approximately age 15).
- In practice, this may erode the educational space and use of minority languages.

### Specific restrictions on religious freedom:

- Religion is incorporated into the ideological control framework.
- The draft requires that the “consciousness of the Chinese national community” penetrate education, religion, culture, media, the internet, and other fields.
- Religious activities must comply with the unified ideological framework; religious expression that is perceived as challenging this unified consciousness may be considered “harmful to national unity” or “undesirable thought.”

## 6. Draft of China's "National Unity Law"

### Potential hidden risks / possibilities for abuse:

- Speech, expression, publishing, academic research, social media posts, and other content may be treated as undermining national unity and punished.
- Activities related to minority cultural festivals, traditional customs, folk beliefs, and folk arts may be restricted or prohibited.
- Language assimilation may be enforced.
- Mandarin education may be strongly promoted, weakening mother-tongue education and native-language courses.
- Cross-border and overseas influence may be deterred.

## 7. "Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services"

- **Issued:** December 3, 2021, reviewed and approved by the National Religious Affairs Administration and four other departments, and publicly released.
- **Effective:** March 1, 2022, and remains in effect to date.

### Core provisions or content:

- Providers of religious information services must obtain an *Internet Religious Information Service Permit* approved by the religious affairs department.

### Specific restrictions on religious freedom:

- Individuals or non-official religious organizations (including house churches, underground churches, etc.) may not disseminate religious content without a permit.
- Overseas religious organizations or individuals are prohibited from providing religious information services within China.

### Potential hidden risks / possibilities for abuse:

- The Cyberspace Police may remove religious content on the grounds of "affecting stability."
- Self-hosted media preaching, sermons, gospel articles, etc., all constitute violations and may result in account suspension or fines, without judicial procedures.
- Underground churches or unregistered religious groups that often use the internet to communicate faith or organize activities face legal risks under this measure.

## **PART THREE: ANALYSIS OF POLICY MEASURES AND RESTRICTIONS**

## **Part Three: Analysis of Policy Measures and Restrictions**

### **I. Main Restriction Methods and Governance Logic**

This section categorizes and analyzes the core restriction mechanisms implemented by the Chinese government in 2025 religious policy, from the perspective of institutional design and governance logic.

#### **Restriction Mechanisms:**

##### **Institutionalized Approval System and Organizational Registration Restrictions**

- Approval systems are applied to all religious matters, including church activities, personnel appointments, gathering locations, theological training, and publications.
- Only officially registered religious organizations are legally allowed to operate.
- This ensures that organizations are controllable, personnel are manageable, and activities are predictable.
- Non-official churches exist in a state of “existence equals illegality”; numerous grassroots religious groups are removed or forced underground.

##### **Criminalization and Administrative Punishment through Law**

- Ordinary religious behaviors (such as home gatherings, offerings, sacraments, printing religious materials) are brought under the scope of the Criminal Law, Public Security Administration Punishments Law, Publication Management Regulations, and other regulatory frameworks.
- Ideological control is packaged under the guise of “rule of law”; legal means suppress targets deemed illegal.
- Legal procedures are used to crack down on non-political religious activities, and believers face long-term harassment and lives of fear.

##### **Political Loyalty Requirements and Doctrinal Transformation**

- Promotes the “Five Identifications” and the Sinicization of religion.
- Religious sites must display national flags and establish Party-mass organizations; pastors must pass “thought reviews.”
- Religion is internalized into the state political system, undermining religious independence.
- Faith systems are mixed and altered; religion becomes an “auxiliary ideology.”

**Digital Governance and Real-Name Monitoring Systems**

- Online preaching platforms must implement real-name registration and reporting.
- Religious content is subject to internet censorship; believers' online participation is tracked in big-data systems.
- "Electronic religious control" is implemented in the name of "cybersecurity."
- Online preaching space is severely reduced; believer privacy is systematically collected, and platforms serve as tools for national security collaboration.

**Local Performance-Oriented Governance**

- Local governments participate in religious suppression competitions through "religious governance performance indicators" (number of churches closed, propaganda coverage, effectiveness of ideological penetration).
- Religious governance becomes part of local stability and performance metrics.
- Abuse of power, arbitrary enforcement at the grassroots level, and heightened religious-state tensions lead to radicalized implementation of central policies.

**Cultural and Spatial Control Consolidation**

- Churches are renovated with "Chinese-style" designs.
- The national anthem and flag are introduced into religious sites (progress made over recent years).
- Party history education displays are installed in churches.
- Islamic associations replace official public accounts and remove Arabic elements from emblems.
- Cultural and visual remodeling strips religious sites of sacredness, turning them into political spaces.
- Religious architectural symbols are systematically "de-Christianized," undermining believers' sense of identity and belonging.

**Generalization of the Anti-Espionage Law and "Foreign Infiltration" Scope**

- Foreign funding, believer exchanges, theological training, and publication resources are labeled as "enemy infiltration," weakening international support networks and isolating Chinese religious groups.
- Legitimate transnational faith interactions are misinterpreted and suppressed; international religious organizations withdraw, leaving Chinese believers isolated.

**Administrative Monopoly over Clergy Qualifications**

- Clergy appointments, titles, and degree conferrals must go through Party-led procedures.
- Those who do not comply with "Party control of religion" cannot obtain legal status.
- A controlled, loyal clergy is constructed.
- Independent training routes are destroyed, the pastoral workforce becomes politicized, and the quality of faith declines.

## II. Emerging Restriction Strategies and Technology Integration Trends

In 2025, governance strategies present a “technology–law–culture” trinity of suppression:

### Technological Suppression Mechanisms

- Church platforms, sermon audio, offering tools, prayer groups, etc., must be registered with real names.
- Believers’ faith privacy is fully exposed to government oversight, increasing social fear effects.
- Combined with facial recognition, location monitoring, church surveillance cameras, and real-name entry systems, activities are made fully visible; churches become “transparent spaces,” restricting genuine worship.
- Faith activities of civil servants, employees in public institutions, and minors are particularly restricted.

### Data Reporting Systems

- Individual churches are required to report monthly on believer data, finances, and sermon plans.
- Activity planning is controlled by the state, allowing dynamic intervention.
- Online content is censored, and platforms automatically delete “sensitive words,” such as “God,” “prayer,” “resurrection,” “Second Coming.”
- Core doctrines are censored; essential teachings cannot be fully transmitted.

### 2. Original Religious Discourse, Policy, and Replacement Terminology

- For example, preaching is replaced with “illegal use of information networks,” distorting language semantics and framing activities negatively to provide a legal basis for suppression.
- “Disciple training” is replaced with “brainwashing by illegal religious organizations,” blurring the distinction between religious education and cult activity, creating pretext for crackdowns.



### **III. Comprehensive Suppression Model of the Civil Church Ecology**

#### **Church Organizational Structure**

- Unregistered churches are illegal; pastors without credentials are criminal; unfilled gatherings are considered disruptive.
- Underground churches face systemic collapse, and believers are pushed into “household-unit” faith.

#### **Preaching and Pastoral Pathways**

- Online blocks, textbook control, platform suppression.
- Pastoral chains are interrupted, intergenerational transmission is broken, and theological education loses its foundation.

#### **Funding Sources**

- Foreign offerings are banned; domestic accounts are frozen or investigated.
- Financial exhaustion prevents churches from maintaining daily operations.

#### **Spaces and Buildings**

- Buildings are demolished or converted into “cultural squares”; church architecture is forcibly “Sinicized.”
- Sacredness of faith spaces is lost, weakening religious identity.

#### **Community and Interaction**

- Small group meetings are monitored; offline gatherings are unsafe, online activities are tracked with real names.
- Collective faith becomes individualized; believers are isolated and silenced.

### **Summary: Policy Restrictions as an Institutional, Universal, Multi-Dimensional Religious Suppression Strategy**

- Although Marxist parties like the CCP are unable to completely eliminate religion, their governance tone is one of “control” and “submission.”
- The “Party controls religion” theory has shifted from a political principle to a governance tool integrating administrative mechanisms, technology, and cultural engineering.
- Policy restrictions are not only “prohibition” but also “redefinition”: transforming religious behavior into instability, political risks, and infiltration threats, stripping religion of legitimacy from the source.
- The entire restriction system presents itself in “legal form,” appearing compliant and procedurally proper, while in substance forming a system of covert violence against religious freedom.
- Its most prominent characteristic is “legal yet oppressive,” showing fragmented implementation, comprehensive suppression, flexible punishment, and deep intervention across multiple dimensions.

# **PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PERSECUTED IN CHINA**

PHOTOGRAPHS OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN CHINA



**Pastor Zhang Sen  
(left) of Maizhong  
Reformed Church,  
Fuyang, Anhui**



**Wang Honglan and  
others, Hohhot, Inner  
Mongolia**



**Pastor Wan  
Changchun (second  
from right) and  
family, Anhui**

PHOTOGRAPHS OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN CHINA



**Pastor Huang Yizi,  
Wenzhou, Zhejiang**



**Pastor Xue Shaoqiang  
(second from left) and  
Pastor Cao Binting  
(second from right),  
Anhui**



**Mrs. Yang Rongli (left)  
and Pastor Wang  
Xiaoguang (right),  
Jindengtang Church,  
Shanxi**

PHOTOGRAPHS OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN CHINA



**Pastor Li Jie (left) and  
Pastor Han Xiaodong  
(right), Holy Covenant  
Home Church, Shanxi**



**Pastor Jin Mingri  
(Ezra Jin), Zion  
Church, Beijing**



**Pastor Wang Lin (left)  
and Mrs. Su Ziming  
(right), Zion Church,  
Beijing**



PHOTOGRAPHS OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN CHINA



**Father Ma Xianshi,  
Wenzhou Catholic  
Diocese**



**Zhang Yadi, Scholar,  
Hunan**



**Feng Siyu, Scholar,  
Zhejiang**

## **PART FOUR: ANALYSIS OF KEY CASES (2025)**



### **Case One: The Case of Ma Yan, a House Church Preacher in Yinchuan, Ningxia**

#### **Case Summary:**

In August 2024, a home religious gathering in Yinchuan, Ningxia (with fewer than 10 participants) was raided by local public security authorities. The gathering leader, Ma Yan, a house church preacher, was subsequently given 10 days of administrative detention on the charge of “violating public security administration regulations.” After the administrative detention period ended, the police converted his detention into criminal detention and formally arrested him on suspicion of the crime of “organizing an illegal gathering.” In addition, two other believers were given 7 days of administrative detention on the charge of “disrupting social order.”

In another similar case, the Maizhong Reformed House Church in Fuyang, Anhui Province, was shut down by the government in 2023. Over the past two years, the church has repeatedly faced surprise raids; its pastors and believers have frequently been detained, followed, and forced to relocate. On June 29, 2025, during Sunday worship, the church was raided by the police. Elder Ma Tao and Pastor Chang Shun were taken away and placed under criminal detention the following day. Pastor Zhang Sen was arrested in Xuzhou on July 9 and taken back to Fuyang for detention. The alleged charge was “organizing an illegal gathering.”

#### **Case Analysis:**

House churches outside the official “Three-Self” system are generally unable to obtain venue registration or approval for activities. As a result, any private religious activity risks being interpreted as an “illegal religious activity” or an “unapproved gathering.” The charge of “organizing an illegal gathering” has rarely been used in practice in religious cases. In these cases, the number of participants was small; there were no activities in public spaces, no disturbance to the public, and no organized political expression. Nevertheless, they were still classified as “organizing an illegal gathering.” This indicates that law enforcement standards are continuously expanding and that a “zero-tolerance” attitude toward house gatherings is becoming further entrenched.

## **Case Two: Non-Profit Distribution of Bibles Ruled as an “Illegal Business Operation” Case**

### **Case Summary:**

In Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, a total of nine Christians—Wang Honglan, Wang Jiale, Liu Minna, Yang Zhijun, Ji Heying, Ji Guolong, Zhang Wang, Liu Wei, and Li Chao—were sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment ranging from one year to four years and ten months for activities related to the purchase and distribution of Bibles. They were also fined amounts ranging from RMB 5,000 to RMB 1,000,000. The case has drawn external attention to China’s policies on the management of religious publications and the legal risks faced by house church communities.

According to case files and statements from family members, all the Bibles involved were purchased through legitimate channels within the state-approved “Three-Self” church system. The principal defendant, Wang Honglan, used profits from her business operations to provide Bibles to believers at prices lower than the purchase cost, in order to subsidize access for more Christians. Available information indicates that these activities generated no commercial profit, and there is no evidence of organized resale or profit-seeking intent. Nevertheless, local law enforcement authorities classified these actions as illegal publishing business activities, accusing the defendants of selling religious publications without authorization, thereby constituting the crime of illegal business operations, and imposed criminal penalties on that basis.

### **Case Analysis:**

The Bible is classified as a religious publication subject to special state control and may be distributed only through the government-approved “Three-Self” system. Even when individuals obtain Bibles through lawful channels, they are explicitly prohibited from privately selling or distributing them in any form. A key feature of this case is the expanded application of criminalization: the source of the publications was compliant; there was no profit-making in the distribution process; and no commercial distribution network was formed. This case reflects the continued tightening of official control over the circulation of religious publications.

### **Case Three: The Use of the Crime of Fraud to Punish Religious Offerings**

#### **Case Summary:**

Some house churches have been placed under investigation by local public security authorities for the crime of “fraud” due to their continued collection of offerings from believers. For example, in the case of the Living Stone Reformed Church in Bengbu, Anhui Province, Wan Changchun and three others were charged with “fraud” in connection with church offering funds. After more than a year in detention, they were tried in 2024. The prosecution fabricated “victims,” yet the believers named as “victims” stated in court that they “had not been defrauded” and firmly maintained that the pastors were innocent and had committed no deception.

Police claimed that such churches were “unregistered” and “collected offering money,” and on this basis froze church accounts, seized cash donation boxes, and imprisoned pastors. In recent years, the number of religious leaders prosecuted under the charge of “fraud” has increased significantly, with documented cases exceeding 50. Some individuals were subjected to short-term detention, while others were formally arrested and imprisoned.

#### **Case Analysis:**

The authorities’ underlying logic equates “unregistered” with “illegal,” and treats the collection of offerings as fraud. Offering is an internal, traditional religious practice; even if a church is unregistered, this does not automatically make it illegal, nor do the financial transactions of civil social organizations constitute illegal activity. Churches are not engaged in profit-making operations, and the government has not produced evidence of tax violations or illicit financial flows. Reclassifying religious funds as “business operations” or “fraud” amounts to a denial of the legitimacy of religious communities.

## **Case Four: Overseas Theological Training Classified as “Illegal Border Crossing”**

### **Case Summary:**

Dong Yanmei (Christian name: Ruhamah), a female house church coworker from Mianyang, Sichuan, held a valid passport issued by the Ministry of Public Security of the People’s Republic of China. After passing normal inspection by Chinese customs, she legally exited China and traveled to Malaysia, a visa-free destination. While there, she participated in a Christian gathering. After returning to China, she was formally arrested by Mianyang police on the charge of “organizing others to illegally cross the national (border) boundary.” Three other Christians were arrested in the same case and are currently released on bail pending trial.

In another case, Pastor Sun Chenghao from Gansu traveled to Jeju Island, South Korea, which is a visa-free tourist destination for Chinese citizens. He attended a graduation ceremony and organized a group chat for coordination purposes. In 2025, he was imprisoned on the charge of “organizing illegal border crossing.” On November 20, he was sentenced to four years and six months of fixed-term imprisonment and fined RMB 10,000.

In Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, a Catholic nun named Xiang Qiaoyun (a member of the Sacred Heart Missionary Sisters of Southern Shanghai) organized a Catholic pilgrimage to Europe. In June of this year, she was detained, and in September the authorities charged her with “organizing illegal border crossing.” She did not engage in human smuggling or illegal entry; however, the authorities still classified the trip as “illegal exit,” on the grounds that she had not declared the itinerary as a religious activity.

### **Case Analysis:**

Overseas education and travel are fundamentally matters of individual freedom. By broadly applying terms such as “illegal border crossing,” the authorities create a chilling effect, and in some cases extend scrutiny under labels such as “espionage activities,” “illegal infiltration by foreign forces,” or “organizing illegal migration.” The underlying objective is to sever connections between overseas churches and Chinese believers.

## Case Five: Real-Name Audio Sermon Systems and Digital Surveillance

### Case Summary:

In East China, a church in Zhejiang (identified anonymously as Church A) was summoned by internet regulatory authorities over its WeChat mini-program, “Daily Sermons.” The stated reason was the presence of “listeners who had not registered under their real names.” The platform was forced to shut down for 24 hours and was required to implement a “real-name registration function” and a backend data synchronization policy.

Separately, on June 26, Pastor Huang Yizi of Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, was taken away by authorities on suspicion of “illegal business operations,” in connection with his non-profit promotion of Bible audio players. Four other church coworkers were detained at the same time; all have since been released on bail pending trial. Huang Yizi has been targeted in religious cases before.

- In 2014, for opposing the Wenzhou authorities’ removal of church crosses, he was sentenced to one year in prison for “gathering a crowd to disrupt social order.”
- In September 2015, he was again accused of involvement in the “theft of state secrets” for overseas entities and was placed under residential surveillance at a designated location for nearly five months; the case was later widely regarded as lacking sufficient evidence.

Charges such as “illegal business operations” and “leaking state secrets” have been used to deal with unapproved religious publishing, dissemination, and cross-border exchanges by religious groups.

### Case Analysis:

Real-name registration systems undermine believers’ right to anonymously access sermons; mandatory data synchronization enables the government to obtain believers’ personal identities and create “electronic profiles.” Technological tools are being used for political surveillance, and the digital religious space is being comprehensively taken over by the authorities. Even activities that are “non-political” and “non-organizational” are being brought into an administrative surveillance framework.

The first case above was handled in accordance with Article 20 of the Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services. In the second case, religious publications and devices (such as Bible audio players), even when non-profit and intended only for internal use by believers, can still be classified as “illegal business operations.”

Taken together, these cases demonstrate a clear trend:

- **Online:** strict real-name registration, controllable data, and increasingly precise censorship;
- **Offline:** the instrumentalization of criminal law, with “illegal business operations” becoming a common risk for religious groups.

## **Case Six: Jin Deng Tang Church and Covenant Home Church in Linfen, Shanxi**

### **Case Summary:**

Jin Deng Tang Church in Linfen, Shanxi Province, refused to join the official “Three-Self Patriotic Church” system and has therefore been listed as a key target of sustained suppression over many years. Multiple church members were arrested in August 2021, with core members detained for several years and charged with “fraud” (related to offerings and church financial practices). The prosecution failed to provide evidence of victim complaints or actual financial losses.

The sentences were exceptionally severe. Pastor Wang Xiaoguang of Jin Deng Tang Church was sentenced to 9 years and 10 months; his wife, Yang Rongli, received 15 years; core member Li Shuangping was sentenced to 9 years and 2 months and fined RMB 100,000. Several other key defendants were also given heavy sentences of varying lengths.

In another case from the same region, Li Jie and Han Xiaodong of Covenant Home Church were tried in May 2025 on the same charge and sentenced to more than three years in prison, while Wang Qiang received a sentence of 1 year and 11 months.

### **Case Analysis:**

The use of the crime of “fraud” as a catch-all offense provides legal cover for suppressing churches. The need for transparency in church finances is ignored, while voluntary offerings by believers are treated as legally risky behavior. Local Political and Legal Affairs Commissions, public security bureaus, and procuratorates are deeply involved in and intervene extensively in church cases. Defendants’ rights to defense are weakened, trial transparency is reduced, and defendants and their families are unable to obtain fair hearings. Legal procedures are instrumentalized for political purposes.

Prolonged detention severely infringes on the right to personal liberty and causes major disruption to family and social life, while avenues for legal remedy are limited. Using “fraud” charges against church leaders also serves to stigmatize them personally. At the same time, defining religious activities as economic crimes—rather than labeling them as “cult” activities—tends to be more acceptable to the international community and reduces scrutiny and criticism related to religious tolerance and discrimination.

The collection of offerings is a fundamental means by which religious groups sustain church operations and carry out charity, evangelism, and worship. Criminalizing such practices in effect restricts the autonomy and freedom of religious communities to maintain and operate themselves.

**Case Seven: The All Ranges Church (also known as Word of Life Church)****Case Summary:**

Multiple arrests have taken place in Suizhou, Hubei Province; Nyingchi (Linzhi), Tibet; and Shenyang, Liaoning Province. In Suizhou, Hubei, between August and September 2023, 28 Christians were arrested; eight members were formally prosecuted, and four were released on bail pending trial. On December 25, 2024, ten Christians from the “The All Ranges Church” in Bayi District, Nyingchi City, Tibet, were also subjected to criminal charges. In Shenyang, Liaoning Province (the Saierte Fellowship), in early August 2025, the All Ranges Church was accused of holding “illegal gatherings,” and its responsible persons were summoned for questioning.

Churches or believers loosely connected under the name “the All Ranges Church” have faced successive crackdowns by the authorities. Law enforcement agencies have shut down and sealed churches on grounds such as “failure to register,” “illegal religious activities,” and in some cases, covertly labeling them as “cult” organizations. Participants have been summoned, detained, or arrested. In Suizhou, church property at meeting sites was confiscated, and church coworkers were taken away for investigation. In Nyingchi, Tibet, and at the Saierte Fellowship in Shenyang, all pastors are currently under criminal arrest.

**Case Analysis:**

These three cases demonstrate that in some regions of China, unregistered house churches continue to face high-pressure campaigns of suppression. The Way of Life Church, due to its cross-regional organizational structure, has become one of the key targets. The legal definition of “illegal” remains vague, granting local law enforcement agencies broad discretion. During detention at the Saierte Fellowship in Liaoning, pastors reportedly suffered torture.

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ChinaAid Association, Comprehensive report: Chinese Communist Party authorities launch large-scale persecution of the “All Ranges Church” in China <https://chinaaid.org/news/comprehensive-report-chinese-communist-party-authorities-launch-large-scale-persecution-of-the-all-ranges-church-in-china/>

### **Case Eight: Chinese Universities Forcing Students to Declare “No Religious Belief”**

#### **Case Summary:**

In September 2025, an installation guide for a mobile app at Tianjin Electromechanical Vocational College required all students to uniformly fill in “no religious belief” in the “religious belief” field of their personal information. The guide also specifically emphasized that students must “correctly distinguish between ethnic customs and religious belief.”

#### **Case Analysis:**

This incident demonstrates how, within China’s particular political climate, citizens’ freedom of religious belief is being openly and systematically trampled by government departments and educational institutions.



## Case Nine: Beijing Zion Church

### Case Summary:

Beijing Zion Church is a large, unofficial evangelical house church in China. It was founded in Beijing in 2007 by Pastor Jin Mingri and rapidly grew into a network of several thousand believers spread across multiple cities in China (including Beijing). The church primarily met through a combination of online and offline gatherings. Because it refused to accept government supervision and actively participated in the “Mission China” movement, it has faced sustained and severe repression in recent years.

In October 2025, pastors, coworkers, and members in Beihai, Beijing, Shenzhen, and other locations were subjected to large-scale arrests. A total of 23 core members, including Pastor Jin Mingri, were formally approved for arrest and now face criminal charges for the offense of “illegal use of information networks.”

### Case Analysis:

The Zion Church case occurred shortly after the authorities issued the *Code of Conduct for Religious Clergy's Online Behavior* in September of the same year. That code stipulates that only religious clergy who have obtained an *Internet Religious Information Service License* are permitted to engage in online evangelism. Because Zion Church is not registered with the government, its activities fall outside the regulatory framework and may cross official “red lines.”

The government often regards cross-regional, organized, and autonomous religious groups, especially those that do not accept direct official supervision, as potential risks, making such groups more likely to become targets of control. At present, the church is under criminal investigation for the charge of “illegal use of information networks.” This appears to be the first time Chinese authorities have applied this particular charge in a criminal prosecution against a house church organization.

## **Case Ten: Taishun Gathering Place, Zhejiang**

### **Case Summary:**

Starting on December 13, more than a thousand police officers from across Zhejiang Province were deployed to Yayang Town, Taishun County, Wenzhou City, to conduct a coordinated law enforcement operation targeting local Christians associated with the “Gathering Place” tradition (following the legacy of martyr Watchman Nee).

At 3:20 a.m. on December 15, special police forces raided a key meeting venue known as the “Yayang Gathering Place” and took those present away for investigation. Over the first two days of the operation, more than 100 believers were taken in for questioning. From December 16 to 17, approximately 20 additional individuals were detained.

The Taishun County Public Security Bureau issued wanted notices for two Gathering Place Christian leaders, Lin Enzhao and Lin Enci, citing a “gang crime crackdown” as the pretext. Earlier in June, the mayor of Yayang Town led a team to forcibly break down the church doors during a nighttime raid and, without the church’s consent, hung the national five-star flag inside the building. About ten years ago, the Yayang church had also been listed as a target during Zhejiang Province’s “cross-removal campaign.” The connection between these past actions and the current large-scale operation has drawn attention to the local government’s patterns and continuity in managing religious affairs.

### **Case Analysis:**

This operation involved large-scale, cross-regional police deployment, mass arrests, and the closure of religious sites, all carried out without clear legal documentation. Numerous individuals were taken for questioning, detained, and had property confiscated. The authorities used the label of a “gang crime crackdown” to issue wanted notices against two church leaders.

The core of the conflict appears to be the government’s unilateral provocation—specifically, forcibly installing the national flag inside the church, deliberately infringing on Christians’ freedom of conscience and religious belief. Refusal to comply with the flag-raising was met with criminal suppression. The operation is closely linked to earlier campaigns, such as the forced removal of crosses, and broader patterns of local government interference in church affairs.

### **Case Eleven: Catholic Priest Ma Xianshi in Wenzhou Charged with “Illegal Business Operations” for Publishing a Poetry Collection**

#### **Case Summary:**

In 2025, a case concerning the sale of Catholic publications in Yiwu, Zhejiang Province, went to court. The defendants included Father Ma Xianshi, the head of an open Catholic group in the Wenzhou Diocese, a layperson named Zhuang Qiantuan, and a shop owner. All were detained for nearly a year, and the court has scheduled a ruling to be announced at a later date.

The case centers on a church songbook titled Heavenly Road Melodies (Tianlu Miaoyin), which had been legally approved for publication by Zhejiang’s religious affairs authorities. The prosecution claimed that the book was sold to the public at the “Angela Catholic Gift Shop” in the Yiwu Small Commodities Market, allegedly violating the rule that religious publications are “for internal circulation only,” thereby constituting “illegal business operations.” The revenue was deposited into a private bank account opened under Father Ma Xianshi’s name.

Under historical practices in the Wenzhou Diocese, many parish accounts lack formal legal status and have traditionally operated under priests’ personal accounts. The defendants submitted bank statements and Father Ma’s will to show that all funds were used solely for church purposes, with no evidence of personal profit.

#### **Case Analysis:**

Even if a religious publication has a legally approved publication number, any circulation that does not comply with official “internal use only” requirements can create criminal liability. Across multiple provinces, printing, distribution, and sale of religious materials are increasingly subject to strict regulatory oversight. Catholic open groups and parishes in China often lack independent legal entity status, and church finances are frequently managed through clergy personal accounts—a practice also common in Protestant contexts. While management of religious publications is typically an administrative matter, this case has been escalated to the criminal level, reflecting local authorities’ tendency to use criminal law as a tool to control religious affairs and expand their enforcement discretion.

## **Case Twelve: Prohibition of Minors from Entering Churches**

### **Case Summary:**

In 2025, Zhejiang Province's Wenzhou city authorities further tightened religious management policies, issuing a directive that all parish churches must strictly prohibit minors from entering. As a result of this administrative pressure, Wenzhou churches have reported a complete absence of minors in worship or church activities.

Separately, on November 30, a Catholic church on Hubin Road in Xuchang, Henan Province, was ordered to immediately suspend all worship activities and implement corrective measures after a minor participated in a service and played the piano during the ceremony. The official directive required the church to develop "rectification measures" and explicitly treated the incident as a violation of religious management regulations. The policy's clear intent is that minors are not allowed to enter churches or participate in any religious ceremonies or educational activities.

### **Case Analysis:**

Wenzhou has long been a highly sensitive region for religious management, particularly since the 2014 "Cross Removal Campaign," during which government monitoring of religious activities significantly intensified. The prohibition on minors entering religious venues does not have direct nationwide legal basis; it originates from administrative authorities exercising enforcement powers via local government orders.

Since 2018, Henan authorities have continuously implemented stricter administrative controls over religious venues, including: the strict enforcement of bans on minors entering, and issuing local government "church closure orders" that suspend worship and other core religious functions. These measures constitute significant interference in the operation of religious institutions.

China has no national law explicitly forbidding minors from entering churches. Wenzhou's blanket ban derives entirely from administrative directives rather than legislation, raising questions about its legality and necessity. Its long-term impact and intent appear aimed at creating a generational gap among believers to undermine church stability. Parents are deterred from bringing children to church, and Wenzhou's practices may be replicated in surrounding regions.

### **Case Thirteen: Transnational Repression Case**

The government of China seeks to suppress dissenting voices and expressions by minority groups abroad through coordination, acquiescence, or cooperation with other countries. This is carried out by inducing or persuading individuals to return, using pressure to make people “voluntarily” return to China; cooperating with foreign police forces; threatening or harassing family members inside China; and using charges such as “illegal border crossing” or “incitement crimes” to conceal political objectives. It also employs online surveillance, harassment, and intimidation, as well as non-public trials and secret detention. The speech of some overseas students is monitored, and criminal accountability is imposed upon them when they return to the country.

#### **1. The Lu Siwei Case**

##### **Case details:**

Rights defense lawyer Lu Siwei, who had represented multiple sensitive cases (such as the Hong Kong “12 fugitives” case).

- July 2023: He was arrested in Laos while preparing to travel to Thailand and the United States.
- September 2023: He was deported back to China.
- October 2024: He was charged with the crime of “illegal border crossing.”
- April 2025: He was sentenced to 11 months in prison and fined.
- August 2025: He was released upon completion of his sentence.

##### **Case analysis:**

The Chinese Communist Party is suspected of having cooperated with Laos’ government to forcibly repatriate him by bypassing formal extradition procedures. The charge of “illegal border crossing” was used to conceal political motives, constituting an abuse of law. The trial was not public, the detention period was lengthy, lawyers’ rights were restricted, and his personal freedom was tightly controlled. The purpose of this case was to suppress dissent, prevent him from speaking out abroad, and create a deterrent effect on other rights defenders.

#### **2. The Zhang Yadi Case**

##### **Case details:**

Zhang Yadi, a Tibetan Buddhist and a student studying in France, is suspected of supporting Tibetan-related issues. On July 5, 2025, she returned from Paris to Changsha to visit relatives. On July 30, she went missing while traveling in Shangri-La, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province. On July 31, she was taken away by the Changsha Municipal State Security Bureau. She received a scholarship to study at School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, in the United Kingdom, and was supposed to start in Sept, 2025. She is currently being held under the responsibility of the State Security Bureau of Changsha, Hunan Province.

## **2. The Zhang Yadi Case**

### **Case analysis:**

Overseas students with Tibetan-related or rights advocacy backgrounds constitute a high-risk group whose personal safety is not guaranteed upon returning to China. Even while abroad, individuals remain subject to the Chinese Communist Party's long-arm control. No legal procedures or official explanations have been made public, making it impossible to verify the specific circumstances of her detention.

## **3. The Hu Yang Case**

### **Case details:**

Hu Yang, a student studying in the Netherlands, holds a law degree from Wuhan University and a master's degree in political philosophy and literature from the Institute for Philosophy at Leiden University in the Netherlands. On July 26, 2025, he returned to China to visit family. According to his mother, he has fallen into a "thought crime" prosecution because of statements he made overseas. His right to meet with legal counsel has been denied.

### **Case analysis:**

The Chinese Communist Party has extended its "hostage-style governance" beyond national borders, reaching into every Chinese person's mobile phone screens, social media accounts, return airline tickets, and the fear embedded in their minds.

## **4. The Feng Siyu Case**

### **Case details:**

Feng Siyu, a young scholar from Jinhua, Zhejiang Province, has been missing since her arrest in 2018, with no information available to date. She completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the United States and later pursued graduate studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, in the United Kingdom. In 2017, Feng Siyu worked as a translator at the Folklore Research Center of Xinjiang University, collaborating with the prominent Uyghur anthropologist Rahile Dawut on work intended to promote cultural exchange and academic research. This academic collaboration is believed to have been the direct trigger for her arrest.

#### **4. The Feng Siyu Case**

##### **Case analysis:**

Ordinary academic research and cross-cultural collaboration have been redefined as sensitive activities; fields such as folklore, anthropology, and language studies have been incorporated into a highly politicized and securitized governance framework; the boundary between academic activity and national security has been significantly blurred. There is a systemic risk faced by scholars with overseas educational backgrounds, with international academic experience increasingly being treated as a liability. In matters related to Xinjiang, the space for academic research has been systematically compressed.

#### **5. Case of the Detention of Kazakhstani Citizen Alimnur Turganbay in Xinjiang**

##### **Case details:**

Alimnur Turganbay, a 47-year-old Kazakhstani truck driver, was detained by Chinese authorities in Xinjiang. Alimnur had previously cancelled his Chinese household registration and passport and had become a citizen of Kazakhstan, yet Chinese authorities still detained him on the grounds that he was “suspected of holding dual nationality.” The background of the case involves his wife, Guldaria Sherizat, who had participated in activities of the “Real Atajurt Kazakh Human Rights” organization, which has long focused on cases of detention and disappearance of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in Xinjiang. She publicly protested the actions of the Chinese authorities. During one such event, Kazakhstani police detained 18 activists, demonstrating the politically sensitive nature of this case as one involving transnational repression.

##### **Case analysis:**

China does not recognize dual nationality, and Alimnur had already renounced Chinese nationality and obtained Kazakhstani citizenship, yet the authorities used “dual nationality” as the justification for his detention. His wife’s participation in rights advocacy activities on sensitive regional issues carries clear political implications, and the case illustrates that the rights activism of family members may lead to relatives being pursued or detained either abroad or within China.

##### **Summary**

The Lu Siwei case is a typical example of China’s transnational repression, involving illegal repatriation, legal packaging, and human rights violations. The Zhang Yadi case shows similar risks of disappearance and secret control. The Chinese government continues to pressure overseas dissidents through multiple means; even when abroad, individuals cannot be assured of safety. In recent years, China has established a new “red line” for overseas speech and activities, particularly concerning sensitive ethnic issues, and for scholars and students abroad. Individuals engaging in expression, publishing, criticism of Chinese policies, participation in border ethnic studies, or community activities are increasingly subjected to surveillance under these strategies, facing an increasingly tight “risk upon return.”

**PART FIVE: ANALYSIS OF  
TRENDS IN CHINA'S RELIGIOUS  
POLICY AND THE LOGIC OF ITS  
RESTRICTIONS (2025)**



## 1. Overview of Policy Trends: From “Controlling Religion” to “Redefining Religion”

Over the past decade, China’s religious policy has undergone a profound transformation from “passive management” to “active reconstruction.” In 2025, four major evolutionary trends are evident:

**Stability-Centered Control (2014–2017):** High-pressure stability enforcement, crackdowns on “illegal religious activities.” Religion was treated as a “potential source of instability,” with suppression led by Public Security and National Security authorities.

**Institutionalized Control Phase (2018–2021):** Legalization and formal approval systems for religious affairs. Religion continued to be viewed as a “potential source of instability,” with Public Security and National Security leading the enforcement.

**Comprehensive Integration and Redefinition Phase (2022–2024):** Politicization, cultural transformation, and ideological infiltration. Political slogans such as “Sinicization of Religion” and the “Five Recognitions” were promoted.

**Multidimensional Reconstruction and Digital Governance (2025):** Technological intervention, systemic control, and loyalty screening mechanisms. Religious spaces, clergy, and dissemination channels are fully digitally monitored and controllable.

## 2. In-Depth Analysis of Six Major Policy Trends (2025)

### Trend 1: From “Sinicization of Religion” to “Party-ization of Religion”

- **Slogan:** Religion must “integrate with core socialist values” and serve national unity and social stability.
- **Implementation:** Religious sites are forced to display national flags, the constitution, and party history exhibits; Bible content must “adapt to the times,” with the government promoting “re-translations,” which may stall or be abandoned in favor of reinterpretation. Sermons must focus on patriotism, law-abiding behavior, and national unity.
- **Underlying logic:** The regime’s primary anxiety about religion is not theology but organizational power and independence; “Sinicization” is used as a litmus test for political loyalty rather than cultural integration.

**Trend 2: Institutional Legal Facade Masks the Reality of Political Pressure**

- **Governing techniques:** Through laws, policies, and approval procedures, religion is “brought under the rule of law”-- not to guarantee the right to belief, but to restrict it; administrative rules replace religious autonomy.
- **Effect:** All legal religions must endure the “threefold constraints” of registration, approval, and supervision; religious freedom is transformed into “religion permitted under government authorization.”
- **Underlying logic:** The aim is not to protect freedom but to authorize order; the objective is to tame religion into a component of the political system.

**Trend 3: Digital Governance Incorporates Religious Activities into a “Visualized Control System”**

- **Governing techniques:** Real-name preaching platforms, online gatherings requiring registration, sermon review; facial recognition used to monitor church entry and exit; big data analyzes believers’ networks and preaching dissemination paths.
- **Objective:** Create a “no blind spot” faith space; religious activities become part of the state’s algorithmic governance.
- **Risks:** Individual belief trajectories are fully profiled; data can be used to generate “pre-warning” lists for suppression.

**Trend 4: Anti-Espionage Law and Overseas Contact Review as Tools**

- **Legal restrictions:** The *Anti-Espionage Law* (revised 2023) gives the state unlimited definitional space for “non-traditional espionage behaviors”; communicating with overseas seminaries, participating in transnational prayer meetings, or receiving religious books may be deemed “espionage suspicion.”
- **Purpose analysis:** To sever connections between Chinese churches and the global gospel network; to rebuild a domestically controlled religious system with “information closure + organizational disconnection.”
- **Consequences:** Ordinary believers face border restrictions, passport cancellations, or even criminal detention; international religious cooperation projects are largely halted; Chinese churches enter an information-isolated state.

**Trend 5: “Govern First, Legalize Later” Religious Approval Logic**

- **Governing techniques:** All new churches, pastors, and training institutions must “first declare → then get approval → then file → then be supervised”; the legality of religious activities does not depend on constitutionality but on whether they “accept Party control.”
- **Underlying logic:** Religion is not a citizen right but a “special permit subject to approval”; religion is “redefined by the state as a tool” — serving national unity, cultural confidence, and regime stability.
- **Systemic trap:** The vast majority of independent churches’ applications inevitably fail; the “approval mechanism” becomes a legalized barrier for suppression.

**Trend 6: Local “Performance-Based Suppression” Amplifies Central Repression**

- **Governing techniques:** Local governments are required to “reduce the number of illegal religious sites.” According to private interviews, in Hubei and Wenzhou (Zhejiang), local authorities are massively reducing or absorbing church numbers. The number of church closures and converted believers becomes a metric for stability evaluation and promotion.
- **Consequences:** Local religious enforcement is highly aggressive, exceeding legal boundaries; the living space for religious freedom is “preemptively cleared” to meet performance targets.
- **Issue manifestations:** In Chinese provinces, the petition system treat “clearing religious issues” as a key stability focus; local police establish a “faith population database” for dynamic monitoring.

**3. Core Logic of Religious Restrictions: National Security, Ideological Restructuring, Organizational Disruption**

- **National Security Dimension:** Religious organizations are viewed as “potential channels of infiltration.” Internet supervision, the Counterespionage Law, and restrictions on foreign funding decouple religious groups from overseas connections, creating a “domestic-only” system.
- **Ideological Dimension:** Doctrine is seen as an “ideological risk.” Religious texts are rewritten, sermons are reviewed, and curricula are guided so that religious values align with the core socialist values.
- **Organizational Dimension:** Independent churches are viewed as “organizational opposition forces.” Registration blocks, closures and dissolutions, and political vetting of clergy weaken religious organizational structures and enforce leadership compliance.
- **Summary:** The essence of China’s 2025 religious policy is “de-freedom of belief, de-independence of organization, de-globalization of connections.”

#### **4. Strategic Warning: The “Total Control Model” of Religious Governance Has Taken Shape**

In 2025, China’s religious control system is no longer a temporary political campaign, but a structured total control model with the following characteristics:

**Systematized:** Covers five major control axes—legal, administrative, technological, ideological, and cultural.

**“Proceduralized:”** All legally recognized religious activities must be confirmed through administrative procedures.

**Flexible:** The “legality or illegality” of religious behavior can be adjusted according to the political environment.

**Digitalized:** All activities are quantifiable, traceable, and auditable.

**Strategic:** Religion is treated as a potential long-term risk to regime stability from a governance perspective.

## **PART SIX: POLICY AND ADVOCACY RECOMMENDATIONS**

## 1. Academic Sector

**Strengthen independent research:** Focus on tracking the evolution of China's religious policies, especially new trends such as digital regulation and local performance-driven suppression. Publish high-quality, data-rich research reports to establish an authoritative academic voice.

**Provide policy recommendations:** Organize research findings into policy white papers and offer practical recommendations to governments and international organizations, helping decision-makers understand the complexity and urgency of religious freedom issues.

## 2. International Diplomatic Institutions and Embassies

**Sustained monitoring and public statements:** Continuously reveal the state of religious freedom in China through annual reports and case study seminars, keeping the issue visible and preventing it from being marginalized.

**Promote multilateral cooperation:** Collaborate with other countries on platforms such as the United Nations and the International Religious Freedom Commission (USCIRF) to push for international oversight and pressure on China's religious policies.

**Prioritize human rights diplomacy:** Incorporate religious freedom provisions into bilateral negotiations and economic cooperation frameworks, treating religious freedom as a key component of a comprehensive human rights strategy.

**Protect oppressed groups:** Provide refuge and legal assistance to Chinese religious refugees and believers, helping them seek international protection and resettlement.

## 3. United States Government

**High-level officials dialogue:** Engage in systemic discussions on China's rule of law, social policies, and religious freedom framework, going beyond individual cases to promote stable development of religious freedom institutionally.

**Strengthen sanctions and accountability:** Impose targeted sanctions such as visa restrictions and asset freezes on responsible officials and institutions, using tools like the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act to enhance deterrence.

### 3. United States Government

**Support independent faith groups:** Provide funding to Chinese diaspora churches and religious freedom organizations outside China, strengthening their advocacy and assistance capabilities.

**Enhance technology and information support:** Support the development and deployment of communication technologies that bypass censorship, ensuring free communication for Chinese believers.

**Transparency and public reporting:** Regularly publish the China Religious Freedom Report, using factual data to counter Chinese propaganda and create an international public discourse comparison.

### 4. Worldwide Churches and Religious Organizations

**Transnational joint initiatives:** Form international church and clergy alliances, issue joint statements, and hold joint prayer meetings to continuously pray. Advocate for the release of detained pastors and believers, resisting China's religious policy repression on freedom of faith.

**Provide support platforms:** Establish online and offline support platforms for Chinese believers to share experiences, receive psychological assistance, and access legal advice.

**Religious education and dissemination:** Use translation, publication, and online channels to distribute materials free from political censorship, supporting theological education in underground churches.

**Collaboration with international human rights organizations:** Participate in and support the work of relevant NGOs to promote international religious freedom initiatives.

### 5. Media

**In-depth investigative reporting:** Unearth typical cases of religious freedom restrictions in China, with a focus on emerging suppression methods such as digital governance and the criminalization of ordinary religious practices.

**Shaping discourse power:** Use feature reports, documentaries, and columns to reveal the political and social impact behind restricted religious freedom, increasing public awareness.

## 5. Media

**Protecting sources:** Provide secure and anonymous reporting channels for whistleblowers, believers, and scholars to ensure the truthful flow of information.

**International collaborative reporting:** Cooperate with international media to produce joint reports, enhancing the global reach and impact of coverage.

## 6. Civil Society (NGOs, Faith Groups, Charitable Organizations)

**Capacity building:** Organize training and workshops on religious freedom, enhancing public ability to recognize and respond to religious persecution.

**Support networks:** Establish assistance networks for oppressed believers, providing legal aid, biblical counseling, psychological support, and material assistance.

**Advocacy activities:** Apply pressure through petitions, lobbying, and social movements to prompt government and international attention on religious freedom issues.

**Monitoring and reporting:** Set up mechanisms to monitor and report violations of religious freedom, promptly exposing relevant incidents to the international community.

## Summary

The suppression of religious freedom in China in 2025 exhibits multi-dimensional, institutionalized, and technologized characteristics. Addressing this challenge requires coordinated efforts across sectors, leveraging academic research, diplomatic pressure, technological support, and civil society mobilization to secure greater space for survival and expression for faith communities in China.



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# **2025 REPORT ON GOVERNMENT PERSECUTION OF CHURCHES AND CHRISTIANS IN CHINA**

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