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CHINA: Religious issues & persecution – Bimonthly Digest 16-31 October

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General

23.10.2023 – 10 things to know about China's policies on religion

Pewresearch – Earlier this year, China issued new rules on religious activity that tighten oversight of clergy and congregations.

The rules are part of a long-standing strategy by the Chinese government to align religion with communism and ensure loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which espouses and promotes atheism. More recently, such rules have also been intended to bring religion in line with traditional Chinese culture and with “Xi Jinping Thought,” the Chinese leader’s blend of Marxism and nationalism.

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26.10.2023 – ‘Sinicization means obedience’

ChinaAid – A fierce debate continues regarding the Communist Party’s policy of Sinicization of religion. During a symposium in Hong Kong, an anonymous scholar described it as “obedience.”

The symposium took place at the Chinese University of Hong Kong as it celebrated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Divinity School Of Chung Chi College.

It was titled “Spirituality, Culture, and Chinese Societies: Interdisciplinary and Interfaith Dialogues,” on October 6.

Scholars expressed their views on Sinicization. One scholar quoted an anonymous scholar, stating, "To put it simply, Sinicization means obedience," but argued that attempts at transformation would not succeed. Another scholar remarked, "Claiming one's own culture as unique alone can bring danger."

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24.10.2023 – ‘ Religious belief ‘ survey form sent to Shandong students and their families.

ChinaAid – Recently, Shandong province sent out a religious belief survey form to K-12 families. The form inquired about students' and family members' religious beliefs.

The survey form contains questions for students, including basic information like name, class, and address. However, it also asks about their religious beliefs, when the student became a believer and their reason for becoming a believer. The questions don't end there. Questions continue, asking children where they meet for religious gatherings, the frequency of the meetings, and the student's attitude towards religious beliefs.

Each question requires detailed answers. Students are not the only ones filling out the form either. Every close family member must answer similar questions, like basic information and whether they attend religious gatherings. All of these questions will be used to further persecute all religious minorities in Shandong.

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Buddhists

30.10.2023 – ‘Tibetans in Tibet were so happy to see him

finally'

Free Tibet – Throughout 2023, Free Tibet's research partner, Tibet Watch, has been conducting a series of interviews with a group of newly arrived Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala, northern India, who escaped from occupied Tibet.

Due to its length, we have divided this latest account into three parts. Parts one and two are also available on our website.

In this final part, the refugee, a forty-year-old woman from central Tibet, details how the Chinese government has invested significant money in civilian and military infrastructure on Tibet's borders with India, describes the effects of the residential boarding school system on the Tibetan language and briefly talks about the reaction inside Tibet to Tibetans seeing a video of the Dalai Lama in early 2023.

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Falun Gong

30.10.2023 – Falun Gong surgeon raped in prison and forced to drink urine

Bitter Winter – Li Lizhuang was arrested and sentenced to more than ten years in jail for promoting the “Nine True Word Meditation” during the COVID pandemic.

The case of orthopedic surgeon Li Lizhuang is one Falun Gong practitioners have managed to bring to national and even international attention through their skilled use of social media, but now new horrific details have emerged.

Li, born in 1973, graduated from Harbin Medical University in

1995. In the same year, he started practicing Falun Gong. He was an attending physician at the Orthopedic Surgery Department of the First Affiliated Hospital of Harbin Medical University and seemed to be promised a brilliant career.

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29.10.2023 – Disabled in the persecution of Falun Gong, 65-year-old woman faces prison sentence again

Minghui – Having become disabled due to toxic injection while serving time for practicing Falun Gong, a 65-year-old woman is facing prison sentence again for her faith.

Ms. Bian Lihua, of Benxi City, Liaoning Province, was arrested at home on April 22, 2022 by eight officers of the Qianjin Police Station. Only one officer wore the police uniform. They raided her place without a search warrant. She demanded to know who they were, the officer in police uniform quickly flashed his ID while standing over three feet away. Ms. Bian's collection of over 80 Falun Gong books, laptop, music player and other personal items were confiscated.

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25.10.2023 – Retired worker faces second prison term for practicing Falun Gong

Minghui – Having been sentenced to three years for practicing Falun Gong, a 65-year-old retired worker is facing a prison sentence again following his latest arrest eight months ago.

Mr. Zhou Yubao, of Shifang City, Sichuan Province, was arrested on February 24, 2023, while mailing a letter. The police raided his home and put him in criminal detention at the Shifang City Detention Center.

Mr. Zhou's family hired lawyer Zhang from Beijing on March 1, 2023. The lawyer and the family soon went to the detention center to visit Mr. Zhou. He told them that the police violated the law while handling his case, including arresting and raiding his home without showing their IDs or a search warrant. Only one arresting officer was in uniform and all of the more than a dozen officers who raided his home were in plainclothes. They did not provide a list of confiscated items as required by law.

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Protestants

01.11.2023 – Street Evangelist Chen Wensheng arrested for the umpteenth time

Bitter Winter – The former drug addict and popular character among Chinese Christians is in jail again in Hunan. He has been detained more than 100 times.

I personally know Chen Wensheng and wrote about him in “Bitter Winter” last year. He is a larger-than-life character who is well-known among Chinese Christians.

Chen is a former drug addict who struggled with his addiction problems for ten years. He overcame them when he converted to Christianity, and then decided to share his experience with others by becoming a street preacher. He traveled with a cross carrying Christian messages throughout various Chinese provinces and even, with some co-workers, to Vietnam, where he was arrested and deported back to China.

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31.10.2023 – House Church graduation ceremony interrupted,

Christians taken away.

ChinaAid – On the morning of October 28, 2023, police interfered in the graduation ceremony of Early Rain Covenant Church's "Workers' College". Some Christians were taken away.

At 10:00 AM, the church held a graduation ceremony for the Workers' College in a conference room of a hotel near the Jiangxin Building. Over 30 church members attended the ceremony.

In the midst of the worship service, more than officials from the Political Security Bureau (formerly known as State Security) and the Civil Religion Bureau suddenly entered the room. More than 20 individuals, including police and community officials, interrupted the ceremony and declared the gathering illegal.

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24.10.2023 – The Christian exodus from China

Mercatornet – “Run” (跑) has been one of the hottest words in the Chinese language since 2021. A clever wordplay on both the Chinese pronunciation and English meaning of the word, “run” refers to the recent trend of emigrating from an increasingly restrictive and authoritarian China for greener pastures overseas.

This emigration wave, which began shortly after Xi Jinping amended the Constitution in 2018 to abolish term limits, took off during Covid and has only accelerated since. This can be reflected in the surge of illegal Chinese immigrants arriving at the US-Mexican border. In the 2023 fiscal year alone, US Border Patrol has apprehended 24,000 Chinese migrants at the Southern border, up 1,115% (i.e., 11.5 times more) than the previous fiscal year. Chinese migrants crossing the Darien Gap

on their way to the US has become a common sight, with both English and Chinese-language media offering extensive coverage of this new phenomenon.

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17.10.2023 – Government controlled churches must establish 'surveillance' boards

ChinaAid – Government-controlled churches in China held a supervisory board conference in Shanghai on September 26. During the meeting, they discussed a set of rules for the supervisory board and another set of methods for implementing these measures. In reality, the supervisory board functions as a “surveillance” board, aiming to facilitate mutual reporting, disclosure, restraint, and supervision within the Christian community and among Christians.

On October 2nd, the official website of the China Christian Council (CCC) and National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), reported that their supervisory board was held in Shanghai. According to their report, Pastor Gao Feng, the chairman of the supervisory board of the TSPM, reviewed the main work of the council over the past five years. This work included convening seven board meetings and formulating two sets of new measures, both of which have not yet been officially disclosed. Chairman Gao Feng mentioned that the provincial CCCs and TSPMs in eleven provinces have established supervisory. Through discussions and exchanges, these supervisory boards may better fulfill their roles in future work on religion.

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