

# CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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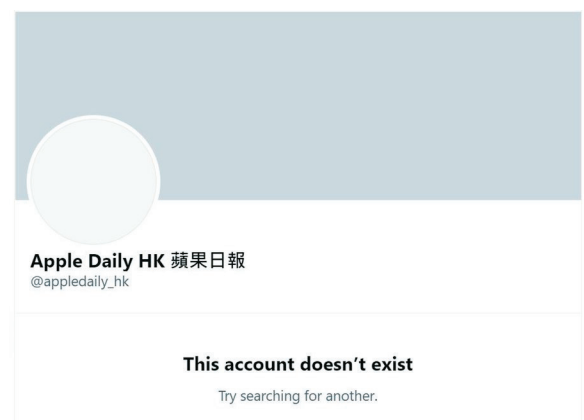
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## IMAGE OF THE MONTH

### Apple Daily Erased

On June 24, Hong Kong's prodemocracy newspaper *Apple Daily* released its final edition and [wiped](#) its online presence after police raided its offices and arrested staff on national security charges. The paper had 600,000 [paid](#) subscribers at the time of its closure. This image shows a [notification](#) that the newspaper's Twitter account, which [had](#) over 500,000 followers, had been deleted; it was one of several such notices that users [received](#) on social media platforms like [YouTube](#) (1.89 million followers), [Instagram](#) (1 million followers), and [Facebook](#) (2.6 million followers). The paper also shut down its website, which had [received](#) nearly 18.7 million visits in May.

Credit: [Jerome Taylor](#)



ANALYSIS

# Reading between the Lines of the CCP's Centennial Propaganda Blitz

By Sarah Cook

Sarah Cook is the research director for China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan at Freedom House and director of its [China Media Bulletin](#).

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THIS ARTICLE WAS ALSO PUBLISHED IN THE DIPLOMAT.

## ***Troop deployments, censorship, and exhaustive promotion point to deep uncertainty about the party's future.***

As the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) prepares to celebrate its 100th birthday on July 1, Beijing's propaganda and information-control apparatus is out in full force to ensure that the party—and “core leader” Xi Jinping—receive uniform praise for being “great, glorious, and correct.” Many of its initiatives illustrate the extent to which the CCP has managed to repurpose key features of capitalism—social media, e-commerce, and tourism, for example—with an ideological spin that serves the Leninist regime's political interests.

Despite the bombast and marketing innovations, the campaign seems to be infused with insecurity. Indeed, its insistent, heavy-handed tone amounts to an acknowledgment that the Chinese people and the world at large are not entirely convinced by the CCP's claim to be the only legitimate and desirable source of leadership for China.

### **Propaganda old and new**

Messaging, merchandise, and activities promoting the CCP have long been a part of daily life in China. But ahead of the anniversary, they have become more pervasive, surpassing the usual level of sloganeering. Some efforts fall into the formats one might expect before of an important date: new [museums](#) opening, films being released to [theaters](#) and at [festivals](#), an upsurge in “[red tourism](#)” at sites deemed meaningful to CCP history, and sales of “[red clothes](#)” on e-commerce sites. Domestic state media are publishing [congratulatory remarks](#) from a hodgepodge of foreign politicians, including counterparts from communist parties in countries like the [United Kingdom](#), [Spain](#), and [South Africa](#). [Embassies and consulates](#) have also taken to hosting events and pilgrimages to overseas “red” sites.

But these traditional exercises have been supplemented with new elements that seem aimed at saturating public consciousness and conversations, while reinforcing Xi's position as the country's paramount leader. A massive public education [campaign](#) focused on party [history](#) was launched in February. It included the release of [80 national propaganda slogans](#)—including several with Xi at the center—a scale that the China Media Project described as “unprecedented in the reform era.”

Particular energy has been devoted to ensuring that the younger generations “[inherit red genes](#).” For example, propaganda officials have launched [200 social media accounts](#) designed to influence university students, and the party has developed various interactive [educational materials](#) like web portals, televised knowledge competitions, and animated shorts. A new [history academy](#) founded in 2019 has been posting punchy

updates to Chinese social media platforms and using online marketing tactics alongside more staid academic-style publications. A [hip-hop brand](#) published a [rap video](#) in which 100 artists—including several high-profile performers—joined forces to tout the CCP’s accomplishments.

By infusing reminders of the CCP’s dominance into practically every facet of Chinese society and daily life, from history and culture to popular entertainment, the regime is advancing one of the central goals of these campaigns—to reinforce the perception that China as a nation is indistinguishable from the Chinese Communist Party.

### **Skepticism and censorship**

While many people in China appear to be getting into the spirit of the anniversary celebrations, others have proven less eager. [Netizen](#) reactions to the rap video were surprisingly candid, with critics saying it was simply “bad” and referring to the rappers as “100 slaves.”

Such online critiques were quickly deleted. According to the [South China Morning Post](#), more than 7,000 comments about the video on the NetEase Cloud platform quickly dwindled to just 35. The government has also taken pre-emptive steps to suppress negative responses to its broader campaign. The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) launched a [hotline](#) in April for netizens to report other social media users who “distort” the party’s history or attack its leadership, and in May the CAC claimed to have ordered the deletion of at least [two million posts](#) for promoting “historical nihilism” and “insulting martyrs.”

Even in official publications, the space for admitting the CCP’s past errors appears to have shrunk. A new version of “A Short History of the Chinese Communist Party,” an official account for the general public, excised previously permissible references to the Great Leap Forward famine as a “bitter historical lesson” and to Mao Zedong’s mistakes during the Cultural Revolution.

Physical restrictions have complemented the censorship and propaganda measures. The media have reported a [massive security deployment](#) in Beijing to deter and address any unforeseen incidents, and several known dissidents have been sent on forced “vacations” outside the city for the weeks surrounding the anniversary date. [Maoists in Shandong Province](#) have also reportedly been detained since mid-May, highlighting the CCP’s wariness even of those who might voice dissent from within its own ideological camp.

### **What isn’t being said**

In striking contrast to such displays of power is the insecurity implied in the party’s messaging and official actions. [Slogans](#) such as “Listen to the party, appreciate the party, follow the party” sound more like a parent’s urgent, frustrated demands for obedience from a wayward child than the triumphant cheers of a genuinely confident and revered ruling party.

Similarly, in the international realm, recent [speeches](#) by Xi and other top officials have called for greater [innovation](#) to reach global audiences more effectively—including by obfuscating the source of pro-Beijing messages by delivering them through seemingly unaffiliated [influencers](#). These suggest an understanding that despite billions of dollars spent on foreign-facing propaganda, Chinese state media lack credibility. Xi’s declaration that party propagandists should make China and the CCP seem more “[lovable](#)” also underscores the limits of the regime’s heavy-handed style to date, and its failure to cultivate authentic goodwill through “soft power” attraction and persuasion.

The fundamental problem facing the CCP’s propaganda apparatus is that the reality of party history is much more unsavory than leaders are willing to acknowledge. It includes disastrous policies that cost tens of millions of Chinese lives during the Mao era, as well as more contemporary crackdowns on student demonstrators, human rights lawyers, Tibetans, Uyghurs, Christians, and Falun Gong adherents—not to mention the daily abuse and indignities suffered by victims of corruption, ham-fisted development schemes, or population controls.

That the CCP’s birthday lands on the anniversary of the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to China is a poignant reminder of how the party was unable to win the “hearts and minds” of Hong Kongers over the course of 24 years. Instead, through the enforcement of a new National Security Law, it has resorted to an iron fist to crush the territory’s political rights and freedom of expression.

Xi and the CCP leadership have refused to change course on their detrimental policies, which weaken their legitimacy among a sizable, if silenced, contingent of the population at home and many audiences abroad. They are simply doubling down on coercion, flooding the information space with hollow slogans, and investing in new ways to expand the party’s control over what can and cannot be said about its history.

As the CCP enters its second century, only time will tell whether such intransigence guarantees the party’s political survival or sows the seeds of its eventual demise.

## IN THE NEWS

### Censorship updates: Live-streaming restrictions, LGBT+ apps, Tiananmen anniversary, new memes, disfavored celebrities

- **Tencent expands censorship rules for live streaming:** On June 3, Tencent [released](#) new rules that expanded the list of banned behavior and content on WeChat Channels, the video section of its popular WeChat mobile application. The rules, which go beyond established government censorship directives, reflect how private technology companies in China must interpret and enforce the Chinese government's constantly changing redlines on banned content, essentially [making](#) their own censorship lists a “proprietary asset.” Some of the new banned content [includes](#) fortune telling or superstitious content, words or acts that do not promote “positive social values,” tattoos, and certain conduct related to sexuality, including specifications on women’s clothing.
- **LGBT+ apps removed from Apple China store:** A report [released](#) on June 14 documented 27 LGBT+ apps that were removed from the Apple store in China. According to the authors, the removals were likely due to either government censorship or a preemptive decision to self-censor so as to adhere to Chinese government laws, which [ban](#) content that violates “social morality” and have prompted many tech companies to remove LGBT+ content. Apple [claimed](#) that it did not take down the apps cited in the report, and that they were removed by the developers. A recent *New York Times* [investigation](#) found that Apple had banned thousands of apps in China based on an unpublished list of sensitive topics and ahead of government requests, and did not make information on such decisions publicly available. The new report’s authors pointed out that iPhone users have no means of accessing apps that are not made available in the company’s app stores, which disadvantages marginalized communities when Apple proactively censors on behalf of authoritarian regimes.
- **Chinese tech firms censor June 4 anniversary:** Chinese company censors tightened restrictions around the 32nd anniversary of the June 4 Tiananmen Square massacre, with users reporting [deleted posts](#) and the [banning](#) of accounts after they posted images of candles. Social media platform Douban temporarily [blocked](#) influencer accounts from posting any content for four days starting on June 2. WeChat prevented its users from changing their profile pictures or user names, Weibo [removed](#) its candle emoji, and live-streaming platform Douyu paused all comments under videos. E-commerce site Little Red Book (Xiaohongshu) had its Weibo account suspended after it inadvertently posted, “Tell me loudly: what’s the date today?” on June 4, highlighting the unintended consequences of ignorance fostered by decades of censorship regarding the events of 1989.
- **Censors cut Friends cameos, cryptocurrency accounts, Gen Z meme, and US news website:** Censors blocked a range of content over the past month on streaming sites,

social media platforms, and through the Great Firewall. On May 27, certain cameo appearances on the *Friends* television sit-com reunion special—such as those by Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, and the South Korean band BTS—[disappeared](#) from streaming sites in China. The erased celebrities had all crossed government red-lines in the past by, for example, meeting with the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama. Viewers speculated that the streaming sites had censored the content themselves, as the special’s length varied from platform to platform. On May 30, Douban [took down](#) a 10,000-member group on the Generation Z counterculture [meme](#) “lying flat,” which refers to a passive approach to life that undermines government efforts to foster a hardworking youth; Douban then began blocking the term itself. In another incident, Weibo [began](#) to take down cryptocurrency accounts on June 5–6 on the grounds that the content “violates laws and rules.” On June 15, researchers [discovered](#) that the website of the US-based newspaper *Washington Times* was blocked by the Great Firewall.

## Surveillance updates: Data Security Law adopted, Uyghurs face high-tech monitoring, Apple withholds privacy feature

- New Data Security Law stresses national security, stiffens penalties:** On June 10, China’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee [passed](#) a new Data Security Law. Compared with previous drafts, the final version included several important changes, such as the addition of tighter regulations for a [new category of data](#) deemed to impact national security, as well as [increased penalties](#) for violations of the law. The law notably has an extraterritorial dimension, prohibiting the sharing of any data stored in China with foreign law enforcement or judicial bodies, a new requirement that could affect various cross-border legal proceedings and business activities. The punishments prescribed by the legislation include revocation of business licenses, prison sentences, and fines of up to 10 million yuan (\$1.56 million). The law comes into effect on September 1. Additional implementing regulations are expected to be announced both before and after that date.
- Uyghurs targeted with AI software testing and malware attacks:** An anonymous software engineer [revealed](#) to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in late May that police have been testing emotion-recognition software on Uyghur detainees. Police officers reportedly use “restraint chairs,” which shackle the detainees’ ankles and wrists, during the testing process; the software is meant to use changes in expression or perspiration to interpret a person’s state of mind, for example whether it was “negative” or anxious. Emotion-recognition software is often [considered](#) pseudoscientific. Police have previously [collected](#) Uyghurs’ biometric information in detention facilities and [through](#) a public health program, and fed the data into a mass surveillance system in Xinjiang. Separately, on May 27, cyber threat intelligence firms Kaspersky and Check Point Research [revealed](#) that the United Nations

logo and fake websites for nonexistent nonprofit funders have been used to install malicious software on the devices of Uyghurs located in China and abroad, including in Pakistan. The firms noted that the attacks appear to be continuing in 2021 against Uyghurs in Turkey and Malaysia.

- **Xinjiang police continue to use DNA equipment despite US ban:** Chinese procurement documents reviewed by the New York Times this month [reveal](#) that police in Xinjiang are continuing to acquire DNA equipment made by US-based firms Thermo Fisher and Promega. In 2019, the United States [banned](#) American companies from selling such technology to most law enforcement agencies in Xinjiang over human rights concerns, unless a company successfully applied for a special license. Chinese companies appear to be buying DNA equipment and reselling it to the Xinjiang police, raising questions about the due-diligence processes of the American suppliers.
- **Apple denies Chinese users new privacy feature:** On June 8, Apple revealed that a feature that would mask users' web browsing behavior by stripping internet protocol (IP) addresses will [not be available](#) in mainland China due to regulatory constraints, though it will be available to users in Hong Kong. The announcement comes at a time when Chinese netizens are increasingly [frustrated](#) with the pervasiveness of personalized tracking software. Last month, the *New York Times* reported that Apple had also [agreed](#) to move Chinese users' data to a Chinese state-owned company's servers, and to keep the encryption keys to this data on Chinese soil, putting all Chinese Apple users at greater risk of surveillance.

## Police focus on Tiananmen anniversary, defamation of CCP heroes, online fan groups, and news of a COVID-19 outbreak

- **Police detain activists over June 4 commemoration:** Despite 32 years of censorship and criminal penalties designed to suppress commemoration of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, several activists tried to mark the June 4 anniversary and were consequently detained or [sent](#) on forced "travel." On May 28, Guangzhou police criminally detained prominent activist Wang Aizhong for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," an offense commonly invoked against rights activists. The arrest was believed to be a [preemptive](#) act to prevent him from commemorating the anniversary. In Hunan Province, police [put](#) activist Chen Siming in administrative detention for 15 days beginning on June 1 after he posted a [photo](#) of a candle and a sign online. On June 5, Guangzhou police [criminally detained](#) another activist for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" after he posted a photo on Weibo of himself holding a sign saying "Pray for the country on June 4." Also on June 5, police in Guangxi [interrogated](#) activist Li Yanjun for posting images from the famous "tank man" video on Twitter, accusing him of spreading "false information on the internet."

- **Criminal penalties for insulting CCP heroes, martyrs, and soldiers:** After the May 22 death of a revered Chinese agronomist who [developed](#) a strain of rice that helped reduce famine around the world, police [detained](#) five people for WeChat and Weibo posts that were critical of the scientist. The netizens had apparently been reported to police by other users following the enactment of a new law prohibiting defamation of “heroes and martyrs.” Separately, blogger Qiu Ziming received an eight-month prison sentence on June 1 after a Nanjing court [convicted](#) him of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” for two [posts](#) to his 2.5 million followers on Weibo that authorities said defamed martyrs. China’s legislature further [expanded](#) the criminalization of speech by passing a law on June 10 that bans the “slander” of soldiers; it was set to take effect on August 1.
- **App developer sentenced to five years in prison:** In a first criminal trial of its kind, a software developer surnamed Cai [received](#) a five-year prison sentence and RMB 6 million (US\$940,000) fine for “intruding on a computer information system.” The developer had created a fan application that allowed users to artificially hype their favorite celebrities on Weibo, state media reported on May 27. The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) has [repeatedly announced](#) crackdowns on “chaotic fan groups” this year.
- **Two detained for comments amid new outbreak of COVID-19 cases:** Police in Guangdong Province [detained](#) two individuals on June 1 and June 5 for their comments on WeChat about COVID-19 amid a new outbreak of locally transmitted cases in the province. According to state media, one man received a five-day administrative detention for “spreading rumors and disrupting public order,” and the second man spent 10 days in administrative detention for saying he had tested positive for COVID-19.
- **Politics and technology blogger disappears in Shanghai after 12 years of anonymous posts:** The anonymous hacker behind a popular blog [called](#) *Program-Think* has been [missing](#) since his last post on May 9 and is believed to have been detained by Shanghai police. Over the past 12 years, the blog has [provided](#) readers with tips on how to access the uncensored global internet and protect one’s privacy online, [exposed](#) CCP officials’ hidden wealth, and shared political commentary on sensitive topics like the June 4 anniversary.



## HONG KONG

### Prodemocracy paper forced to close amid new website blocks and prosecutions

Over the past month, the Hong Kong government has stepped up its attacks on free expression, with police [arresting](#) activists for using social media to promote alternative forms of protest after the annual Tiananmen vigil was banned. Another annual assembly, marking the July 1, 1997, handover of Hong Kong to China, was [canceled](#) by organizers due to the risk of charges under the National Security Law (NSL). News emerged in late May that Beijing's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office will open a new propaganda department [tasked](#) with “managing media outlets and public opinion” in the territory.

The following were among other major developments related to media and internet freedom in Hong Kong:

- **Prodemocracy newspaper *Apple Daily* shuts down:** *Apple Daily* [released](#) its final edition on June 24 and [shut down](#) its website and online television channels and social media accounts in response to an [unprecedented](#) police raid and the arrests of its chief editor, other newsroom staff, and executives at parent company Next Digital, all under the NSL. Authorities accused the newspaper's staff of “colluding with foreign forces” by publishing articles since 2019—prior to the NSL's implementation—that called for foreign sanctions against Hong Kong and Chinese government officials. Police also froze HK\$18 million (US\$2.3 million) in corporate assets, leaving the company unable to pay staff or receive payments from lenders. On June 23, police arrested the lead opinion writer on charges of “conspiracy to collude with foreign forces,” and the paper ordered other journalists not to come into the office due to the risk of being [arrested](#). Several journalists [resigned](#). Police reportedly intended to demand that the paper [delete](#) approximately 100 articles from its website, according to local media, before the paper removed all of its online content. The company also [closed](#) a sister publication, Next Magazine.
- **National security film censorship rules introduced:** The Hong Kong government [amended](#) the Film Censorship Ordinance on June 11, adding new guidelines for censors to prevent the release of films with content that is “objectively and reasonably capable of being perceived as endorsing, supporting, promoting, glorifying, encouraging or inciting” any act that endangers national security or may “jeopardise the safeguarding of national security.” The changes [come](#) as a consequence of the NSL and are likely to severely undermine artistic expression in Hong Kong, which had been known for its vibrant film industry. Prior to the amendment, Hong Kong's Office for Film, Newspaper and Article Administration had [warned](#) the hospital workers' union after it screened films about the Tiananmen Square massacre for its members.
- **Former lawmaker denied bail over WhatsApp messages:** Hong Kong's High Court

[cited](#) WhatsApp messages that former lawmaker Claudia Mo sent to journalists working for international media, and the [content](#) of those messages, to deny her [bail](#) in a “conspiracy to commit subversion” case. The charges against Mo, who had been in custody since February, stemmed from her participation in a prodemocracy primary election in 2020.

- **Hong Kong service providers block overseas activist website:** Since June 18, Hong Kong internet service providers have [blocked](#) access to the exile website 2021 Hong Kong Charter (2021hkcharter.com). Hong Kong police would not comment when asked by local media if they had ordered the block, which the NSL permits them to do. This is the sixth known website to be blocked in Hong Kong in 2021. The 2021 Hong Kong Charter website went down temporarily earlier in June after Hong Kong police [ordered](#) its Israel-based hosting provider to close it.
- **Pushback against RTHK censorship:** On June 7, the High Court [held](#) a hearing in a lawsuit filed by the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) Programme Staff Union and the Hong Kong Journalists Association in response to the Communications Authority’s decision to punish the public broadcaster over an episode of a satirical show aired in 2020. In another case of pushback, a survey of Hong Kong teachers [conducted](#) between May 31 and June 7 by the teachers’ union called on RTHK to restore its deleted online content so that they could use it for educational purposes; the teachers emphasized the scarcity and value of high-quality Cantonese-language materials on history and government affairs. Meanwhile, self-censorship has been rampant at the broadcaster in recent weeks. RTHK management [announced](#) on May 25 that reporters could be punished and fined for airing video of a previous Tiananmen vigil without authorization and [fired](#) a prodemocracy radio host on June 18.

## BEYOND CHINA

### Censorship and surveillance abroad, academic pushback, US tech ban rescinded

- **Beijing’s censorship regime penetrates foreign tech companies:** Throughout June, LinkedIn [notified](#) some users outside China that they had posted “prohibited content,” such as references to the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, on their profiles, and that it would no longer be viewable from inside China. LinkedIn has been [sending](#) these notifications for years, but the recent uptick comes after the Cyber-space Administration of China (CAC) [rebuked](#) LinkedIn in March for not censoring enough content. Separately, the Hong Kong police [sent](#) a request on May 24 to Israeli hosting company Wix to remove an activist website (<https://www.2021hkcharter.com/>) on national security grounds; the company complied with the request before [reversing](#) course three days later, likely due to public outcry. Similarly, on June 4, the Microsoft search engine Bing [blocked](#) searches for “tank man” in the United States, Germany, and Singapore, among other countries. Though Microsoft claimed

that the blocking was due to “human error,” the timing was suspicious given that it occurred on the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

- **Beijing requests data from Cambodia COVID-19 app, Nigerian officials seek filtering expertise:** A June 10 media [report](#) claimed that the Chinese ambassador to Cambodia had asked local officials to hand over data collected from the country’s COVID-19 contact-tracing application, offering technological assistance in exchange. In April 2020, Human Rights Watch [described](#) the Cambodian app as overly intrusive. Last year, the Chinese government reportedly [made](#) a similar request in Thailand but was rebuffed. Freedom House has [raised](#) concerns about the privacy and surveillance risks of COVID-19 apps. In a separate indication that the Chinese government’s model of internet controls is gaining traction abroad, Nigerian officials [reportedly](#) requested assistance from the CAC to build a domestic internet firewall; the Nigerian government had recently imposed a [ban on Twitter](#).
- **Adoption of Chinese surveillance technology accelerating:** On June 9, a *Financial Times* report [revealed](#) data from the US-based firm RWR Advisory Group indicating that 64 countries have signed 144 safe-city and smart-city contracts with Chinese vendors since 2009, of which 49 were scheduled for installation in 2018 or later. Over 60 percent of the countries involved with such contracts were listed as Partly Free or Not Free by Freedom House. Chinese-made surveillance systems continue to be adopted abroad despite concerns about the suppliers’ role in human rights violations in China. A June 9 report said the Chinese company Hikvision [will](#) be providing surveillance cameras for upcoming elections in Russia, and a May 24 report [revealed](#) that as recently as December 2020, US cities were still purchasing video equipment from Hikvision and Dahua—both of which are on the US Department of Commerce’s list of prohibited contractors—because the list only applies to federal agencies. In light of China’s growing technology and surveillance footprint, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute relaunched its Chinese technology company [tracker](#) on June 8. In one instance of pushback, the international Security Industry Association [expelled](#) Dahua on June 1 for ethics violations.
- **Academic pushback from Hungary and Canada:** On June 5, thousands of people [protested](#) plans to establish a campus of China’s Fudan University in Budapest, amid broader fears of Beijing’s growing influence in Hungary. Their efforts [may](#) have borne fruit, as a senior aide to the Hungarian prime minister said on June 7 that the campus’s future could be put to a referendum. By then, the opposition-led Budapest city government had already [renamed](#) streets near the planned campus as “Free Hong Kong Road” and “Uyghur Martyrs Road,” among others. On May 24, the Canadian province of Alberta [asked](#) four comprehensive academic and research universities to halt any new partnerships with the Chinese government and to review its existing relationships. These moves come as a mounting number of Beijing-backed Confucius Institutes have been [closed](#) at schools and universities around the world.
- **US rescinds WeChat and TikTok ban:** On June 9, US president Joseph Biden [rescinded](#)

previous executive orders that would have effectively banned WeChat, TikTok, and several other China-based software applications in the country. Implementation of those bans, imposed under former president Donald Trump, had been hampered by ongoing court challenges. Biden's executive order [instructed](#) the Department of Commerce to review "foreign adversary" software applications based on specific criteria, leading to the complete withdrawal on June 21 of the department's related bans on WeChat and TikTok. The new order also clarified criteria for identifying software that poses an "unacceptable risk" and called on federal agencies to recommend measures to protect US consumer data from "foreign adversaries."

## FEATURED PUSHBACK

### Fighting to keep the memory of Tiananmen alive

Due to tightened political controls or COVID-19 concerns, for the first time in recent memory, no in-person memorial vigils were held on the June 4 anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan. Instead, people in those locations found alternative, creative, and courageous ways to remember the atrocity and the democratic aspirations of the movement that was crushed that day.

On the mainland, the mothers of massacre victims [persevered](#) in marking the day when their children were killed and [kept up](#) their calls for the perpetrators to be held accountable, despite strict surveillance by police. Several activists in Guangzhou, Hunan, Guizhou, and elsewhere marked the anniversary with lone protests or social media posts, facing detention and harassment as a result (see image below).

In Hong Kong, for the second year in a row, residents faced a ban on the annual Tiananmen vigil in Victoria Park, with police citing COVID-19 and national security concerns. Despite the ban, many Hong Kongers [gathered](#) online to watch plays and readings, staged lone protests, or held up their illuminated mobile phones outside the park. Activist Chow Hang Tung issued a call on social media for residents to light a candle wherever they are in memory of the victims; police later arrested her for "publicizing an unauthorized assembly." In Macau, after police [banned](#) a vigil, organizers [vowed](#) to hold it inside and broadcast it online.



In Taiwan, a local COVID-19 outbreak forced organizers to hold their [vigil](#) online, though they also erected a small memorial pavilion in Taipei. Taiwan was the only country in the Chinese-speaking world to hold an [officially](#) supported event. In-person vigils were organized in cities around the world, including [Washington, DC](#), [New York City](#), [London](#), and [Sydney](#).

## WHAT TO WATCH FOR

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- **CCP tightening controls over information technology:** As the Chinese Communist Party prepares to celebrate its centenary, many [China scholars](#) are thinking about the party's future. Watch for increased party [integration](#) with the major Chinese technology companies that built and maintain the networks on which the state now relies to reach its citizens, alongside other efforts by the party to use tech innovation to shore up its political power and social control.
- **Anti-Sanctions Law and the regulation of foreigners and speech:** On June 10, the Chinese government [adopted](#) an Anti-Sanctions Law that will form a legal basis for [imposing](#) direct sanctions on individuals or organizations that “endanger national security” or for retaliatory sanctions on targets linked to foreign governments’ sanctions on China, taking the form of visa denials, asset freezes, and deportations. Amid this climate, popular American writer Peter Hessler was [forced](#) to leave China after losing his teaching job. Watch for signs of self-censorship or other measures to regulate the speech of individuals and foreign entities that could be affected by the new law.
- **Real-name SIM-card registration in Hong Kong:** On June 1, the Hong Kong government [announced](#) a new bill that would require real-name registration of SIM cards and grant police the authority to [request](#) such data from telecommunications companies without a warrant in certain circumstances. The measure would go into effect September 1 once adopted by the legislature. Watch for an increasingly emboldened Hong Kong police force that requests data on Hong Kong residents to [strip away](#) anonymity on and offline, as well as increased surveillance more generally and the [curtailment](#) of privacy and free expression rights during the second year of the National Security Law's implementation.

## TAKE ACTION

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- **Visit the *China Media Bulletin Resources* section:** Learn more about how policy-makers, media outlets, educators and donors can help advance free expression in China and beyond via a [new resource section](#) on the Freedom House website.

### For more information

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- For archives, go to: [www.freedomhouse.org/China-media](http://www.freedomhouse.org/China-media)
- For additional information on human rights and free expression related to China, see: *Freedom in the World 2021*, *Freedom on the Net 2020*, *Beijing's Global Megaphone*, and *The Battle for China's Spirit: Religious Revival, Repression, and Resistance under Xi Jinping*



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