

CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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IMAGE OF THE MONTH

Censored Song Mocks Chinese Nationalists

A song from Malaysian rapper Namewee and Australian singer Kimberley Chen that mocks Chinese nationalists, termed “little pinks,” went viral in Chinese-speaking areas in Asia. (The term [originated](#) with a group of young, mostly female nationalist netizens, who were active on a literary website with a pink background.) The song, “Fragile,” has over 27 million [views](#) on YouTube. As a result, Weibo, Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), and other streaming platforms [deleted](#) the artists' accounts in China; Chen had over 1 million followers on Weibo. She later [mocked](#) the ban in an Instagram video.

Credit: [Namewee YouTube](#)



ANALYSIS

Beijing's Content Manipulation Reaches New Frontiers

By Sarah Cook

Sarah Cook is the research director for China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan at Freedom House. This is the third in a series of [articles](#) she has authored on evolving [disinformation](#) tactics emerging from China.

This article was also published in *The Diplomat* on November 16, 2021.

Through a combination of industrial scale and technological clout, the regime is increasing the reach of its influence operations.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has long sought to influence the media and information spaces in other countries, deploying a diverse set of [tools](#) to achieve its aims. Yet for many years there was no significant evidence that China-linked actors were engaging in aggressive disinformation campaigns on global social media platforms like the one pursued by Moscow ahead of the 2016 US elections.

Since 2019, that picture has [changed](#). Multiple investigations and large-scale take-downs of inauthentic accounts have demonstrated that pro-Beijing forces are indeed carrying out a broad range of manipulative activities on global social media platforms. Moreover, they are constantly [adapting](#) their tactics to maximize efficacy.

A new set of investigations on the topic have been published over the past six months. Collectively, the findings point to an unparalleled scale of activity—surpassing even the Kremlin's—with important implications for global search results, mobile phone users worldwide, and domestic politics in the United States and elsewhere.

Unmatched scale

The sheer scale of China-linked information manipulation activities is remarkable. One [study](#) from May by the Oxford Internet Institute and the Associated Press documented 26,879 Twitter accounts that amplified posts from Chinese diplomats or state media nearly 200,000 times before getting suspended by the platform for violating rules prohibiting manipulation. Importantly, these retweets, which appeared in many languages, made up a large proportion of all shares for official Chinese accounts. In the United Kingdom, for instance, more than half of the retweets of posts by then ambassador Liu Xiaoming came from apparently fake accounts that Twitter later suspended.

Similarly, according to Google's quarterly [reports](#) of takedowns on YouTube, a total of 10,570 channels were removed for engaging in "coordinated influence operations linked to China" between January and September of this year, with between 682 and 2,946 channels removed each month. This is by far the largest set of takedowns. By comparison, only 192 channels and 12 website domains linked to Russia were removed from YouTube or the Google News feed during the same period.

YouTube appears to be a preferred platform for China-linked propaganda and disinformation campaigns, even if the Chinese official and state media presence on Twitter and Facebook garner more attention. Another investigation, this time by [ProPublica](#), found hundreds of videos in which seemingly ordinary Uyghurs claimed—in almost identical language—that they had seen statements "on the internet" by former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo about severe rights violations in Xinjiang, but that this is "nonsense." The investigation found that many of the videos had been posted in

coordinated time frames, and the subject of one video said by phone that it had been produced by local propaganda authorities. At the time of the investigation's publication in June, the authors reported that "new videos are being uploaded ... nearly every day" to an intermediary platform. They were then posted to YouTube, where they had garnered over 480,000 views.

The persistence of these efforts is considerable, with the China-linked producers constantly renewing the supply of content even as global platforms remove accounts and channels that are identified as inauthentic. They can add a false veneer of public support to Chinese diplomatic statements, and as noted by the Associated Press [report](#), they effectively "distort platform algorithms, which are designed to boost the distribution of popular posts, potentially exposing more genuine users to Chinese government propaganda."

An October 5 article by experts at the [German Marshall Fund](#) explores this phenomenon in greater detail, explaining how manipulation enables state media reporting and other pro-Beijing content to fill information vacuums and enhance performance in search results. The authors found that thanks to the regular drumbeat of Chinese state media and other official accounts promoting the conspiracy theory that COVID-19 originated in a lab at Maryland's Fort Detrick, Google News and Bing News results in August and September for "Fort Detrick" were dominated by outlets like China Global Television Network and *Global Times* rather than more reputable sources that debunked the theory.

Searches conducted by Freedom House last week yielded similar findings. Four of the top five results for "Fort Detrick" on YouTube were either Chinese state media reports or lower-profile outlets that cited Chinese government calls for an investigation of the lab. Five of the top 10 search results for "Xinjiang" were Chinese state media or vloggers who supported official viewpoints, though they ranked lower than news reports by independent outlets that documented rights abuses or cultural destruction.

Expanding to new topics

When most readers and even expert China watchers think of the regime's priority topics for foreign manipulation, those that typically come to mind include the origins of COVID-19, conditions in Xinjiang, the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, Tibet, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Falun Gong, and the image of top leaders like Xi Jinping.

But a review of recent research findings points to a much wider and deeper array of targets. According to Google, although the YouTube channels engaged in China-linked influence operations featured much "spammy" content in Chinese about music, entertainment, and lifestyle, they also contained subsets of content in Chinese and English about "[criticism of the US response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#)," "[growing US political divisions](#)," "[the US COVID-19 vaccine rollout](#)," and "[social issues in the US](#)."

Another campaign exposed by FireEye and Google in [September](#) included posts from fake accounts that encouraged people in the United States to participate in protests, either related to COVID-19 or anti-Asian racism. While there were no indications that

anyone responded to those calls, the attempt signifies a new level of [brazenness](#) in Beijing's efforts to influence domestic politics in the United States.

Even more expansive is a list of censored keywords that was identified by a Lithuanian cybersecurity unit on Xiaomi phones sold outside China. The phones were found to periodically download new lists of banned terms from a server in Singapore that could trigger filters in the phone's browser and music apps. The function appears to be disabled in the "[European Union Region](#)," but it could be "activated remotely by the manufacturer" and may be functional in other parts of the world. The researchers found that the list had grown from 449 Chinese-only terms in [April 2021](#) to 1,376 terms in [September](#), including over 300 terms in English. The list is a hodgepodge of terms related to sex and pornography, words that one might expect the CCP to scrutinize (June 4, Tibet, Xinjiang, Falun Gong, Chinese leaders' names), and a variety of much more general entries.

In English, these include "freedom," "human rights," "democracy," and "election," as well as "Hindus," "Pakistani," and "Islamic." The more extensive Chinese list covers various Chinese activists now in exile—Liu Xia, Chen Guangcheng, and Ai Weiwei—as well as others who are jailed in China, like lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who has been disappeared in police custody for over three years. It also includes a long roster of media outlets that could be perceived as rivals to state outlets and sources of alternative or critical viewpoints in Chinese—Voice of America, *Sing Tao*, *Ming Pao*, *Apple Daily*, Boxun, and Sound of Hope, among others.

The Chinese list notably includes the names of Xiaomi's tech competitors—Samsung, Motorola, and Huawei—and various words linked to North Korea, Hamas, Christianity (including the Chinese characters for "Jesus" and "Gospel"), and the Green Party. A fully activated version of these lists would restrict users' access to a huge swath of content, particularly if they are Chinese speakers. The discovery is one of the most concrete examples of how China-based companies that supply mobile devices, applications, and other key nodes of information-sharing infrastructure in foreign countries can enforce the CCP's censorship regime far beyond the confines of the Great Firewall in China.

A difficult year ahead

It is China's industrial power that sets the CCP apart from other authoritarian regimes with respect to their impact on global information flows. Alongside the constantly adapting inauthentic campaigns on social media platforms owned by US companies, each month brings new examples of how China-based firms like [Xiaomi](#), [Huawei](#), or [StarTimes](#) are infusing their technology exports with propaganda, selective censorship, or surveillance capabilities.

The pressure on these companies to support the CCP line is likely to increase in the coming year, as Beijing hosts its second Olympics amid calls for a boycott, regulators impose a crackdown to bring the Chinese tech sector under tighter supervision, and Xi Jinping prepares to begin an unprecedented third term as CCP leader next November. It is therefore all the more important that foreign governments, tech platforms, journalists, and independent investigators maintain their vigilance and work to detect, expose, and when possible, neutralize manipulation campaigns.

IN THE NEWS

Media narratives: Propaganda boost for Xi Jinping during party plenum, Taiwan, patriotic bloggers

- State media boosts Xi Jinping during high-level CCP meeting:** State [propaganda surrounding](#) a major Chinese Communist Party (CCP) meeting that ran from November 8-11 devoted significant attention to boosting Xi Jinping's achievements at the helm of the party. A recent study found that Xi has [deployed](#) more propaganda, especially in the CCP mouthpiece *People's Daily*, to praise his leadership than any leader since Mao Zedong. The propaganda boost is likely meant to fend off potential criticism over his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic or deteriorating US-China relations, and to [strengthen](#) his likely appointment to a third term as head of the CCP next year. At the conclusion of the meeting, the party [adopted](#) a rare "third historical resolution." Such resolutions had only been adopted in 1945 by Mao, and in 1981 by Deng Xiaoping, and Xi is [invoking](#) history to cement his position alongside Mao and Deng as a CCP leader of historic stature. In some ways, he may be attempting to [overshadow](#) them by emphasizing his modern achievements. Xi also recently announced a new political [concept](#) of "common prosperity" in a speech which was released in an October 15 article in the CCP flagship journal *Qiushi*. The concept refers to ensuring basic public services for the entire population by 2035—further [signaling](#) that Xi intends to retain his political grip on the country for decades.
- Regional channels told to showcase CCP achievements:** On October 29, the CCP central propaganda department and State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) [ordered](#) four provincial satellite broadcasters to reduce entertainment content and "star-chasing," and [instead](#) promote socialism and issues related to Xi Jinping's "new era."
- Propaganda about Taiwan leads to netizen rumors of war:** China has reacted fiercely in the past month to [democratic countries and the European Union's](#) increased efforts to support Taiwan following Beijing's military [incursions](#) into the island's airspace around the PRC's October 1 national day. Led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, statements have denounced the US secretary of state and French senators as "[malicious](#)," and "[selfish](#)." Many of the statements have [included](#) threats, including that China "will take all necessary measures" to prevent Taiwanese independence. After weeks of saber-rattling rhetoric, Chinese netizens [interpreted](#) government recommendations that people stockpile supplies due to COVID-19 supply chain issues as a sign that war with Taiwan was imminent. The rumors led the military to [rebut](#) the news as false.
- Nationalist netizen voices online:** An October 21 [report](#) profiled *ziganwu*, or progovernment Chinese netizens who spread propaganda for free, as compared to the *wumao*, who supposedly get paid. While the *ziganwu* have been [around](#) for years, recently, nationalistic Chinese online users have been active in attacking [Chinese individuals](#) who appear to have connections to people in the US and Europe; mean-

while, “wolf warrior artists” have been [creating](#) art to promote Chinese foreign policy attacks on democratic countries perceived as ideological rivals. While these influencers are largely unpaid and operate separately from the CCP’s propaganda department, not all nationalistic social media engagement is organic; the state boosts nationalistic posts while censoring dissenting views. Recent research has also delved into the private internet companies hired to run official social media accounts [inside](#) and [outside](#) China to “manage public opinion.” This warped information environment alongside the divergent views of netizens likely contributed to the results of a [November 1 poll](#) of Chinese individuals, where 78 percent responded they believed China is viewed “very favorably” or “favorably” internationally. Most polls show [growing unfavorable views](#) of China in countries around the world.

Censorship updates: News source whitelist, #MeToo allegations, Western companies’ exit, minority languages restricted

- Regulators tighten news circulation, private investment in media:** On October 20, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) [released](#) an update of its 2016 Internet News Information Source List—a comprehensive list of the now 1,356 authorized news outlets that can be republished by internet news services, which themselves are barred from producing their own reporting. The updated list continues to [exclude](#) international media, but also [removed](#) *Caixin*, a widely respected business publication with a reputation for investigative journalism, and added the WeChat and Weibo accounts of state media or government agencies. Although experts do not believe the move will impact *Caixin*’s finances or daily operations in the short term—given that it operates behind a paywall, it represents a [warning](#) to *Caixin*’s editors and could presage future difficulties for the outlet. In another move to [tighten control](#) over the media, China’s top economic regulator released a [draft regulation](#) on October 8 that would prohibit private [investment](#) in the media, including news gathering, establishment or operation of news organizations, and live radio or television broadcasting. It will likely go in effect later this year.
- #MeToo allegations against top official prompt censorship scramble:** On November 2, tennis star Peng Shuai [posted](#) an essay on Weibo detailing allegations that Zhang Gaoli, the former vice premier and one-time member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo Standing Committee, had sexually assaulted her at one point during an intermittent affair between them that took place over several years. Weibo quickly [deleted](#) her post and censored discussion of the case, as did social media apps WeChat and Douban. The platforms banned words such as “tennis” and “eating melons” (a reference to gossip), prompting netizens to turn to the creative use of homophones, allusions, and other substitutions to discuss the case. While Peng’s post was only shared 1,000 times in the 34 minutes it was online, after it was deleted it was searched for 6.7 million times. The censorship of Peng’s case contrasts with other [recent sexual](#) assault allegations that were less politically threatening to the CCP, and permitted to circulate.

- **New data regulations prompt more US tech companies to exit China:** Starting mid-October, Microsoft’s [LinkedIn](#), [Yahoo](#), and [Epic Games](#) (which operates the Chinese version of Fortnite in conjunction with Tencent) announced that they would shut down services in China, with some citing the challenging business environment. These moves come as China began to [implement](#) the new Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL) on November 1; the law includes broad provisions and stresses the role of national security in data protection. [New draft rules](#) on outbound data transfers announced the weekend before have also increased compliance concerns for overseas-listed tech companies. New regulations—in combination with ongoing efforts to indigenize and control technology services—appear to be making it increasingly difficult for the few remaining foreign-owned tech companies to operate in China. Those that remain, like [Apple](#), continue to [censor](#) content and apps available to users on behalf of authorities.
- **Minority languages banned on video-streaming site, language learning app:** On October 29, the language learning app Talkmate [announced](#) that Tibetan and Uyghur courses would be indefinitely removed due to “government policies.” Around the same time, foreign researchers [reported](#) that Tibetan and Uyghur scripts had been removed from the online streaming platform Bilibili. The online language bans appear to be in line with a wider [shift](#) toward increasingly assimilationist language policies from the central government.

Surveillance updates: COVID-19 overreach, monitoring in Xinjiang, Tencent responds to netizen outcry over data collection

- **Concern about COVID-19 surveillance:** As China continues to pursue a “zero-COVID-19” policy, a resurgence of cases and lockdowns has [sparked debate](#) about the [policy](#) and [complaints](#) about the extensive surveillance and quarantines used to enforce it. Beginning November 2, over 82,000 residents in Chengdu [received](#) phone messages saying they had been marked as “[time-space companions](#)” after GPS data on their phones [indicated](#) they had come within a 800 meter radius, or nearly 1 kilometer, with an infected person for longer than 10 minutes within the last 14 days. The phrase “time space companion” became a popular search result on the Chinese search engine Baidu, and some complained that the phrase romanticizes surveillance. Some human rights activists have [reported](#) that their health QR codes recently turned red for unknown reasons, barring them from travel or accessing public services. China is likely to continue its zero-COVID-19 policies ahead of the Olympics, which open February 4.
- **Xinjiang technology-enabled repression here to stay:** An October 19 report by the Australia Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) examined the [governance mechanisms](#) of the party-state in Xinjiang between 2014 and 2021, and found that Mao-style mass political campaigns had taken place in coordination with a [predictive policing](#)

system—underlining both the longevity and scope of technology-based repression in Xinjiang. It was only the latest [evidence](#) of the CCP’s reliance on intensive propaganda and indoctrination, ubiquitous surveillance, population control, and coercive labor programs in Xinjiang. A book [released](#) October 12 examined US tech firms’ [complicity](#) in enabling human rights violations in the region, through their purchases of Chinese firms’ technology involved in racialized surveillance in Xinjiang. Such purchases have accelerated after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and despite US controls: the rules only prohibit US firms from selling to such companies, but not buying from them.

- **Netizen pushback on apps over data collection concerns:** Following a viral online discussion about popular apps accessing users’ photo libraries, Tencent-owned WeChat [promised](#) that it would stop accessing users photos. The backlash began after a viral Weibo [post](#) from a technology blogger discussed how WeChat, QQ, and Alibaba-owned Taobao frequently accessed iPhone users’ photo albums even when those apps were not in use. A related hashtag had more than 200 million views, and over 94 percent of 30,000 respondents to a survey said they are not comfortable with apps reading their photo libraries. The revelations and the recently enacted Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL) led to [several media](#) and [netizen investigations](#) into other apps frequently accessing users’ location data, including food delivery service Meituan, Alipay, and the Agricultural Bank of China. To date only WeChat has responded to user complaints.
- **Tencent establishes new privacy oversight committee** Tencent was the first big tech company to [announce](#) that it will establish an independent privacy oversight committee to comply with PIPL, which came into effect on November 1. The law’s actual requirements are vague, and legal experts have [questioned](#) whether such bodies will be sufficiently independent from the companies they are meant to police.

COVID-19 journalist in critical condition, ongoing suppression of lawyers, Uyghur student detained, Falun Gong family jailed

- **Jailed COVID-19 journalist in critical condition; man detained over virus meme:** Citizen journalist Zhang Zhan, who is serving a four-year prison sentence for reporting from Wuhan about the pandemic in early 2020, may be close to death, [according](#) to her family. Zhang [has been](#) on intermittent hunger strikes to protest her sentencing in December, and reportedly weighs only 88 pounds. Civil society [inside](#) and [outside](#) of China have called for her immediate release. In another case, Ningxia police [detained](#) a man for nine days for sharing in a group chat a [meme](#) of a dog wearing a police hat as a way of complaining about police-enforced COVID-19 measures. He was charged with for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble,” an offense commonly used in free expression cases. The case was initially covered by state media, and went viral on Weibo with people decrying the excessive punishment, before the article and related hashtag were [blocked](#).

- **Continued persecution of human rights lawyers:** Legal professionals and their families continue to face persecution for speaking out about rule-of-law issues, exercising their right to freedom of expression, and over the cases they take on. On November 1, 14 independent candidates for local elections, including several family members of lawyers, [withdrew](#) their candidacies after facing threats and intimidation from police. The day prior, lawyer Lin Qilei announced he had [received](#) a notice that his law license had been suspended, in likely political retaliation for taking on politically sensitive cases throughout his career, including those of [several activists](#) who in 2020 were apprehended while attempting to flee by boat from Hong Kong to Taiwan, Tibetan activist [Tashi Wangchuk](#), and others. Lawyer Hao Jinsong is still awaiting trial after being [detained](#) in 2019 on several charges over his tweets on current events, comments about Chinese leaders, and in apparent relation for providing legal services. The whereabouts of lawyer Gao Zhisheng remains unknown since he was disappeared while under house arrest in 2017; his wife, living in the United States, has said she [believes](#) he is dead and demanded authorities provide information.
- **Two journalists formally arrested:** On October 22, Hainan police announced they had formally arrested investigative journalist turned businessman Luo Changping on charges of “defaming heroes and martyrs.” He had been [detained](#) on October 7 over a Weibo post questioning the role of China in a Korean War battle, as it had been depicted in the nationalistic blockbuster, “The Battle of Lake Changjin.” In another case, on November 5, the families of investigative journalist and women’s rights activist Huang Xueqin, and labor rights activist Wang Jiangbing, [received](#) notice that the two had been formally arrested on charges of “inciting subversion;” they had gone missing on September 19 as Huang was [preparing](#) to fly to the United Kingdom to start a university degree. Huang had helped sexual assault survivors tell their stories as the #MeToo movement began to take off in China in 2018, and had also been detained for reporting on the Hong Kong protests.
- **Uyghur student detained in Guangzhou:** An October 26 media report said Abduqadirjan Rozi, a doctoral student at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, had been detained in April and then sent back to Xinjiang, where he was arrested on unclear charges. He had previously been [praised](#) by authorities as a “model person” and is one of hundreds of Uyghur writers and intellectuals jailed in recent years.
- **Falun Gong practitioners given heavy prison sentences:** A Tianjin court [sentenced](#) a family of Falun Gong believers to prison on September 4, likely in connection with printing and distributing information about the banned practice. The father, Li Guoqing received 12 years in prison; his wife Yu Bo 10 years, and their daughter Li Lei received 7 years. In another case, a Falun Gong practitioner and nurse [received](#) a four-year sentence in August in Jiangxi, after being caught speaking to someone on the street about the spiritual discipline.

HONG KONG

National security convictions, independent media under attack, retroactive film censorship law

Human rights and free expression conditions in Hong Kong continue to deteriorate, leading Amnesty International to [announce](#) on October 25 that it was closing its two offices after operating in the city for 40 years. Days later, on November 1, Jimmy Lai and seven others [went](#) on trial for “organizing, participating and inciting others” to take part in last year’s annual Tiananmen Vigil, which police had banned. Police and organizers of the October 24 Hong Kong marathon reportedly questioned runners for wearing [shorts](#) or [tattoos](#) that said “Keep it up Hong Kong” because it was considered “political speech.” UN human rights experts [wrote](#) to the Chinese government on October 12 and called for the National Security Law (NSL) to be repealed, citing its “fundamental incompatibility” with international law.

Other major incidents of free expression being suppressed in Hong Kong include:

- Two convicted under National Security Law for chanting slogans, Facebook posts:** Hong Kong courts convicted two people of offenses under the NSL on October 26 and November 3, respectively, bringing the total number of people convicted under the law to three. Ma Chun-man was [sentenced](#) to 5 years and 9 months in prison for “inciting secession” over his chants and signs related to Hong Kong independence during protests between August and November 2020. His lawyer [argued](#) that Ma had chanted the slogans to test free speech protections under the NSL. In November, youth activist Tony Chung [pled](#) guilty to secession and money laundering under a deal with the prosecutors to drop other charges. Chung had founded the group Studentlocalism, a youth-led proindependence group on Facebook, which has operated abroad since the NSL came into force.
- Digital news sites close in Hong Kong and Macau, another attacked by HK security chief:** Digital news site DB Channel shut down its Hong Kong operations after the cofounder was denied bail in a separate NSL case. The site, which was founded during the 2019 protests, operates on Facebook and Instagram, where it has 55,000 and 26,000 followers, respectively. Its staff are unpaid volunteers and several based in Taiwan or other countries have indicated they will continue operations. Meanwhile, the prodemocracy digital news site Macau Concealers [closed](#) after 16 years in operation due to the deteriorating conditions in Macau. Separately, on November 7, Stand News editor in chief Chung Pui-kuen [resigned](#), citing family reasons; his wife is one of the *Apple Daily* staff arrested in the NSL raids. The outlet has come under attack recently from [officials](#) and [state media](#), though on November 8 was [nominated](#) for Reporters without Borders (RSF)’s 2021 World Press Freedom Awards. A government advisor, speaking about Chung, [said](#) the NSL is being used to make the “survival room” for such independent digital outlets “smaller and smaller.”
- Deteriorating press conditions:** Police [rejected](#) 26 out of 27 complaints filed by the Hong Kong Journalist Association (HKJA) to the internal police watchdog over

officers' conduct towards reporters during the 2019 protests, according to an October 19 [press release](#). Then in late October, at least two government departments [tightened](#) their rules for journalists to access records, and granted permission for agencies to transfer reporters' information to law enforcement. On November 5, the Foreign Correspondents Club of Hong Kong [released](#) the results of its first-ever survey of press conditions; 84 percent said press freedom had deteriorated under the NSL. Nearly half said they had plans to leave Hong Kong, or were considering it.

- **Retroactive film-censorship law passed** On October 27, Hong Kong's Legislative Council, which has no opposition lawmakers, [passed](#) by a show of hands the Film Censorship (Amendment) Bill 2021. The law allows films to be banned, including retroactively, on national security grounds. The amendments increase the penalty of screening banned films to three years in prison and a HK\$1 million (US\$128,000) fine. The law [does not](#) apply to films on online streaming platforms.

FEATURED PUSHBACK

Sports activism raises plight of Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Hong Kongers

On October 20, Boston Celtics basketball player Enes Kanter released a video across his social media platforms denouncing human rights abuses in Tibet, and wore shoes an exiled Chinese artist had painted in support of Tibetans. Kanter followed up his post with another in which he highlighted abuses against [Uyghurs](#); [criticized](#) Nike for not speaking out about oppression in China; [called](#) for the 2022 Olympics to be moved from Beijing, and expressed support for [Hong Kongers](#) and [Taiwan](#). Following his first video, Chinese censors [canceled](#) live streaming of Boston Celtics games, [deleted](#) past videos and highlights, and blocked Kanter's name on social media. Unlike in 2019, when China [retaliated](#) against the entire NBA over a single tweet about Hong Kong, the retaliation seemed to be [limited](#) to Kanter and the Celtics.



Boston Celtic's player Enes Kanter's shoes, painted by Badiuca, a Chinese artist living in exile in Australia. Credit: [Badiuca](#)

There have also been [vocal calls](#) from [civil society](#) for a boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, which are set to open in February, over crimes against humanity and acts of genocide against Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities in China. On October 17, three Tibetan rights activists [disrupted](#) a torch-lighting ceremony in Olympia, Greece, tied to the 2022 games. They were arrested, as were four Tibetans outside of the ceremony, in a move the organizers [said](#) had been carried out by Greek police but directed by the Chinese embassy. A Tibetan activist and Hong Kong activist were also arrested in Athens for [unfurling](#) a banner calling for the Olympics' cancellation on scaffolding surrounding the Acropolis. Their protests caused a [media](#) storm that overshadowed the ceremony itself. Some Olympic athletes have also started to speak out, with US Olympic ice dancers [raising](#) human rights in China during an October 18 press conference.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- **Aftermath of CCP sixth plenum:** On November 11, the CCP's high-level sixth plenum meeting [came to a close](#) with a third historical resolution, which placed party leader Xi Jinping on par with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping as among the country's "creators of theories and thoughts." Watch for Xi to consolidate power and leverage the state's censorship and propaganda apparatuses to boost his image ahead of next year's 20th Party Congress, when he will likely be appointed to a historic third term.
- **State-owned company may buy Hong Kong paper:** The *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong's oldest and most influential English-language newspaper, [may be sold](#) by mainland company Alibaba to a company owned by the Central Government's Liaison Office. Watch for further announcements on such a sale and the likely transformation of SCMP into a heavily censored, progovernment outlet should the deal go through.
- **CCP censorship reaching local community groups abroad:** Several incidents from the past month demonstrated the reach of Chinese government censorship overseas and its ability to affect grassroots events. An Australian arts festival [kicked out](#) a Hong Kong group, an American high school [changed](#) a reference to Taiwan on its website, and organizers [canceled](#) book talks in Germany. Watch for the Chinese government's continued attempts to dictate speech globally, and how its diplomatic outposts interfere in free expression activities in other country.

TAKE ACTION

- **Subscribe to the *China Media Bulletin*:** Have the bulletin's updates and insights delivered directly to your inbox each month, free of charge. Visit [here](#) or e-mail cmb@freedomhouse.org.
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- **Support a prisoner:** Learn how to take action to help journalists and free expression activists, including those featured in passed issues of the *China Media Bulletin*, [here](#).
- **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

- For archives, go to: 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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