ANALYSIS  Beijing’s Foreign PR Enablers  P2

IN THE NEWS

• Censorship updates: Comedians, artists, June 4 commemorations, Hui protesters  P6
• Surveillance updates: “Banner alarm,” nationwide police procurement of surveillance systems, civil servant monitoring  P7
• Arrests and attacks: Journalist assault, human rights lawyer sentenced, Uyghur students jailed, Indian correspondent expelled  P8
• Hong Kong: June 4 speech restrictions, protest anthem injunction, rare court win for journalist, youth prisoner “deradicalization”  P10
• Beyond China: Hackers target Kenya, pressure on Polish art exhibit, transnational repression against activist in Laos, Falun Gong, and Hong Kongers  P12

FEATURED PUSHBACK  New museum and global commemorations keep June 4 memory alive  P14

WHAT TO WATCH FOR  P15

TAKE ACTION  P16

IMAGE OF THE MONTH

Inconvenient infographics

This image is one of nine infographics published by Sohu News on Sina Weibo in early June, highlighting social issues such as poverty, youth unemployment, and disabilities. Despite mostly drawing on Chinese government statistics, the images were censored and as of June 15 had all been replaced with blank gray boxes. This example cites a 2022 National Bureau of Statistics bulletin stating that approximately 700 million people in China have a monthly disposable income of under 2,614 yuan ($367)—an inconvenient figure for a regime that touts its antipoverty accomplishments as a key source of legitimacy.

Image: China Digital Times

Visit https://freedomhouse.org/report/china-media-bulletin/subscribe or email cmb@freedomhouse.org to subscribe or submit items.
Public relations firms based in target countries play a critical role in the Chinese government’s global propaganda system.

It has long been common for Chinese diplomats to publish op-eds in major foreign news outlets. Other familiar features of Beijing's international media influence efforts include articles that promote Huawei telecommunications technology while downplaying the firm’s ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), or invitations to journalists and university leaders for all-expenses-paid trips to China.

But how do the relevant actors in the Chinese system identify and make contact with the appropriate individuals and institutions in each foreign society? Increasingly, this service is performed by local public relations (PR) firms—in exchange for lucrative fees.

Country case studies and other research from a recent Freedom House report, Beijing’s Global Media Influence, reveal the extent to which PR firms have been working to get Beijing’s message out and co-opt local voices in countries as diverse as the United States, Panama, Taiwan, and Kenya. In at least some cases, the effort involves covert, coercive, or potentially corrupting activities.

Rare insight through a US law

Uncovering the details of collaboration between Beijing and local PR firms is a major challenge, but public filings under the United States' Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) shed some light on the phenomenon.

A case study on Beijing’s media influence efforts in the United States since 2019, published by Freedom House last month, highlights a contract between the Chinese embassy and Brown Lloyd James (BLJ) in which the embassy paid the firm $144,000 in the first half of 2020 to help diplomats with “crafting, editing, and placing op-eds,” as well as maintaining the embassy’s social media accounts. During those six months, then ambassador Cui Tinkai had articles published by the Washington Post, the New York Times, Bloomberg, and possibly other outlets. Since the contract ended, Cui’s successors have been much less prolific.

But filings dating back to 2011 show that BLJ also contracted with the China-US Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), a proxy entity that is widely viewed as part of the CCP’s United Front work system. The PR firm was paid $20,000 a month to arrange trips to China for journalism students, to enlist former US government officials in writing “positive opinion articles on China” for national media outlets, to analyze “four leading United States high-school textbooks” for their portrayal of Tibet and China, and to develop recommendations for “countering the tide of public discourse” on Tibet. In the first half of 2020, CUSEF paid BLJ more than $300,000 for services including assistance
with funded trips to China for journalists from Vox, Slate, the Boston Globe, the Boston Herald, and the Huffington Post.

CUSEF has sometimes worked with another PR company, Wilson Global Communications. Freedom House uncovered a CUSEF contract under which Wilson earned more than $300,000 in 2019–20 for “building, enhancing, and retaining positive relationships with key opinion leaders in African American communities, students from under-served communities, and African American media outlets.” Subsequent filings provide details on various delegations of Black university students and presidents of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) who were sponsored by CUSEF to visit China.

The China-based company Huawei, known for its close ties to the CCP and its record of building censorship and surveillance systems in China and abroad, has also been a major client for US PR firms. During the first six months of 2021, Huawei paid nearly $800,000 to Ruder Finn to schedule interviews, set up virtual town halls, organize podcast interviews, and facilitate television appearances for Huawei executives in the United States. In 2019, Huawei contracted to pay Racepoint Global at least $55,000 per month and Burson Cohn and Wolfe (BCW) $160,000 for outreach to “targeted media” and “key opinion leaders,” as well as exclusive travel for US journalists to Huawei’s headquarters in Shenzhen that spring. Official filings and media reports show that Huawei’s PR spending reached as high as $3.5 million in 2021 for Ruder Finn and an extension of the Racepoint Global contract through that year.

Global phenomenon
The United States is a somewhat unusual case, given its status as a priority target for CCP influence efforts and the rare level of transparency provided by FARA filings (when they are completed). Still, there is ample evidence that Beijing’s recruitment of PR firms extends to other countries.

In 2019, for instance, Huawei hired the London-based company Wavemaker to implement a $350 million global advertising campaign, including to promote products like consumer mobile phones. At the time, the Chinese firm also faced growing concerns among democratic governments about the surveillance risks associated with its participation in building fifth-generation (5G) mobile networks. One government debating the use of Huawei’s technology was Romania. In January 2022, media reports based on asset declarations revealed that the country’s minister of finance had—prior to assuming his post—been paid by a local PR firm to write several pieces for a Huawei adversorial campaign.

In Kenya, the state-owned firm China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC), which was building a major railway project as part of Beijing’s global Belt and Road Initiative, adopted a similar approach. When it faced negative news coverage related to transparency, racism, and potential damage to local businesses, it hired at least five local PR companies, including the PMS Group, under annual payment plans. According to research published by Hangwei Li and Yuan Wang in February, “these PR companies helped CRBC with tasks such as writing and circulating press releases to local and
international media, crafting media invitations, ... and lobbying for positive media coverage.”

In the Chinese-language media space, PR and advertorial content has been more deeply embedded in local news outlets. The France-based company C-Media, for example, which runs a 24-hour bilingual French-Mandarin television station and partners with China’s State Council Information Office and Chinese state outlets, also has a PR and advertising business, which it says is an important area of revenue growth. In Taiwan, where paid content placements by Chinese government entities is technically illegal, at least one company reportedly runs an advertising agency that serves as an intermediary. It subcontracts paid advertorial content from Chinese government bodies for insertion into Taiwanese media, according to a former senior editor.

**Soft power or authoritarian interference?**

A wide range of corporations and governments—authoritarian and democratic—make use of PR firms’ services to encourage sympathetic coverage and counter negative reporting. However, there are several factors that arguably make Beijing’s practices especially notable and potentially problematic.

The first is the sheer scale of resources devoted to propaganda efforts by the CCP and large China-based corporations with close party ties. The potential for enormous and long-term profits entices international PR firms, creates economic dependencies, and discourages work with other clients that might threaten those relationships. It also reflects a significant imbalance when compared with the resources available in many countries to victims of CCP persecution, or to investigative reporters and civil society activists who document and publicize the regime’s or companies’ wrongdoing.

A second factor is Beijing’s layered use of intermediaries and proxies, such as CUSEF in the US or the various People’s Associations for Friendship with Foreign Countries around the world. These entities are known among experts to be part of the CCP’s United Front work system, but they are unlikely to be familiar to many of the local interlocutors approached by PR firms on their behalf. The individuals on the receiving end of Beijing’s outreach may be completely unaware that the Chinese government is ultimately behind a given article pitch, travel invitation, or event notice.

Third, some actions by PR firms and their Chinese clients have veered from ordinary public relations into censorship, intimidation, or circumvention of local laws, as with the Taiwan example above. In another case in Panama, a mining company with significant investment from the Chinese firm Jiangxi Mining reportedly hired an aggressive PR agency, Corporate Diplomacy, in 2019–20. The agency called up senior media executives to complain about unfavorable coverage and pressed them to discontinue it. Such strong objections carry added weight in Panama, where journalists often face costly defamation suits in reprisal for investigative reporting in the public interest.

Finally, Beijing is known to promote false and misleading content in foreign media ecosystems. Campaigns that simply celebrate the Beijing Olympics, laud China’s
modernization, or call for improvements in bilateral relations may fall within the scope of ordinary public diplomacy. But PR firms, their Chinese clients, and local media outlets become more ethically compromised when the messaging entails the whitewashing or denial of crimes against humanity, the deflection of legitimate national security concerns surrounding telecommunications equipment, or the propagation of conspiracy theories about COVID-19 originating in the United States.

**Formulating a response**

Despite the scale of the Chinese propaganda effort, democratic societies can take steps to mitigate potential risks, protect independent coverage, and promote the diversity of voices in an open media environment.

The PR firms themselves should review the potential harms of the services they provide to CCP-linked entities, notwithstanding the attractive fees, and preferably discontinue them. If a company chooses to retain such problematic clients, it should at least act transparently, even when not required by law, and explain to interlocutors that it is speaking on behalf of entities with Chinese government ties. Governments should enforce and expand transparency and reporting requirements surrounding the provision of PR services to foreign governments, including China’s.

Donors in democratic states should work to close the resource gap by providing civil society groups, investigative reporting projects, and victim communities not only with support for documenting abuses or disinformation, but also with funding to engage in more sophisticated, frequent, and large-scale communications campaigns to publicize their findings.

At the individual level, any editor, journalist, university president, or current or former government official who is approached by a PR firm with an invitation to attend an all-expenses-paid trip to China, to author an op-ed that aligns with Beijing’s talking points, or to undertake any other suspicious project should exercise due diligence in identifying the ultimate source of the invitation. Simple online research, a query to a local expert, or a glance at publicly available FARA registrations in the United States can often yield clear answers and help prevent unwitting co-optation by a brutal authoritarian regime.
IN THE NEWS
Censorship updates: Comedians, artists, June 4 commemorations, Hui protesters

- **Comedians censored, firm fined over irreverent jokes**: On May 17, Chinese stand-up comedian Li Haoshi, known professionally by the stage name “House,” was arrested for making a joke during a May 13 performance in Beijing that was deemed insulting to China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA). The joke, which an audience member posted online, poked fun at the PLA by comparing soldiers to dogs hunting for a squirrel, and invoked a PLA slogan that had once been publicly praised by Xi Jinping. Li’s comedy firm, Shanghai Xiaoguo Culture Media Co., was fined nearly $2 million and had their future shows suspended indefinitely in the capital. Li also appears to have been banned from posting on his Weibo account. The incident sparked mixed reactions online, with some praising the authorities for punishing disrespect and others criticizing it as an attack on freedom of expression. Many of Li’s defenders have been censored, and at least one has been arrested. Separately, on May 22, comedian Nigel Ng, known for his character Uncle Roger, was reportedly banned from Weibo for joking about China’s surveillance state and pleading with the CCP not to make him “disappear.”

- **Paintings, musical performances face restrictions**: Several works of art and performances have also faced censorship or cancelation. On May 24, Chinese artist Yue Minjun’s unsettling images of grinning PLA soldiers were reportedly censored on Weibo. Online nationalists criticized the artist’s “cynical realism” style as insulting toward the military and defamatory of revolutionary heroes. Additionally, multiple performances across China, including a Japanese choral band’s tour, stand-up comedy shows in various cities, and jazz shows in Beijing, were abruptly canceled without explanation.

- **Annual June 4 anniversary censorship, activist surveillance**: In the lead up to the 34th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, censors and security forces intensified restrictions on individuals and terms associated with the crackdown. Social media platform Douban temporarily limited certain influential accounts from posting brand-related promotional content from June 3 to 5. Keywords such as “democracy,” “tank,” “that year,” and “subjects lined up in file” (a phrase referring to the iconic Tank Man photo) were reported to be censored. Markers for the Sitong bridge—the site of a rare banner protest in October of last year—were removed from Baidu maps by Chinese censors. Dissidents and rights defenders in multiple Chinese provinces were reportedly being monitored or forced to go on “tours” in far-flung areas, as often occurs this time of year. At least one human rights activist, Chen Siming, was detained in Hunan on May 27 for posting about June 4th commemorations. Members of the “Tiananmen Mothers” group, whose children were killed in the massacre, were monitored during a visit to Wan’an Cemetery. Meanwhile, police in different parts of China issued notices urging parents and teachers to check children’s phones for foreign communication apps. In Beijing, a woman...
was arrested for waving an American flag and distributing leaflets that contained paragraphs from the US Declaration of Independence outside the national stadium on June 3.

- **Arrests, local internet shutdown after protests at Hui mosque:** On May 27, the partial demolition of the Najiaying Mosque in rural Yunnan led to a clash between local Hui Muslim residents and armed police. Videos of the protests spread online, but news of the conflict was swiftly censored on Weibo. Internet access was cut off in a number of locations, and drones were reportedly used to monitor villagers in the area. Police called for protesters to surrender by June 6 and urged others to “actively report” protesters. Around 30 people were reportedly arrested in connection with protests at the mosque.

## Surveillance updates: “Banner alarm,” nationwide police procurement of surveillance systems, civil servant monitoring

- **Dahua offers “Banner alarm” to authorities:** According to a May report from research firm IPVM, which studies surveillance technology, the Chinese company Dahua Technology developed an artificial intelligence (AI) surveillance system that alerts authorities when a banner is unfurled and records a protester’s face if a protest slogan is detected in a designated area. The system has been available to police since at least November 2020 and remained available in May 2023. Dahua at one point promoted the system for “social security” and “social governance,” terms used by Chinese authorities to justify surveillance, but later removed the explanation. It is unclear which public security departments will use Dahua’s system, but Dahua Technology is a major provider of equipment for the Chinese police. Last year, Hikvision, China’s state-run surveillance manufacturer, offered a similar protester alarm that reportedly helped the Chinese police detect and track demonstrations and other gatherings. Despite the risks of reprisal and arrest, small-scale protests against local officials or businesses are not unusual in China. Freedom House’s China Dissent Monitor has recorded 2,230 dissent events since June 2022—most of them offline, in-person protests.

- **New report tracks police procurement of surveillance technology:** On May 26, a report published by the China Digital Times (CDT) on the procurement of geographic tracking systems by Chinese police revealed that the Chinese security services are building an extensive network of police geographic information systems (PGIS) to predict and suppress social unrest. According to CDT, the system “displays, stores, and analyzes geospatial data,” often for disease or environmental monitoring—but in the hands of police it can be used to coordinate resources or “plot and visualize locations of unlawful activities.” From September 2005 to January 2022, local governments across 30 provinces signed at least 803 PGIS contracts worth 6.2 billion yuan ($860 million). In many locations the procurements increased during the
COVID-19 pandemic. The report found that “some contracts coincided with other
government purchases of surveillance systems specifically designed to target Uy-
ghurs,” and that there were often high procurement levels in regions with signifi-
cant minority populations.

• **Provincial measures raise concerns over monitoring of civil servants:** According to a
May 29 report from Radio Free Asia (RFA), government departments in Guangdong
Province have implemented stricter political screening standards for civil service
recruitment. The new rules include requiring candidates to disclose their social
media accounts, browsing history, and online remarks. Inspectors can either open
and inspect them on the spot or obtain a users’ passwords. On May 25, RFA also
reported that some Chinese local governments are paying public servants using dig-
ital yuan—a virtual currency that can be used for daily transactions, but which has
raised concerns about privacy and government control over finances. These mea-
ures reflect a broader trend since 2019 of increased control over civil servants, in-
cluding monitoring their behavior outside work hours, imposing travel restrictions,
and requiring people to download and study a propaganda app featuring Xi Jinping.

**Arrests and attacks: Journalist assault, human rights lawyer sentenced, Uyghur students jailed, Indian correspondent expelled**

• **Assault of journalist by Guizhou police sparks rare backlash, punishment:** On May 23,
a journalist from Jimu News was assaulted by three police officers including a de-
puty chief while investigating a fatal accident in Bijie, Guizhou Province. The assault
ignited a rare public debate about the hostility journalists face from authorities in
China. By June 2, over 5 million people had viewed footage of the attack. State me-
dia, including the state-run China News Service, condemned the violence and de-
manded justice for the reporter. The three officers were eventually suspended and
detained in connection with the case. Xu Jiangqiao, an editor at Jimu News, urged
the government to release the identities of the attackers and provide an explana-
tion of the incident to the public.

• **Human rights lawyer sentenced; others face charges, harassment, travel bans:** On
June 8, Front Line Defenders reported that human rights lawyer Chang Weiping was
sentenced to 3.5 years in prison for “subversion of state power” after a closed-door
trial lasting less than two hours during which he was denied access to lawyers.
Chang had been detained in October 2020 after posting a YouTube video detailing
allegations of police torture he said took place earlier in the year; he was reportedly
tortured again while in custody between October 2020 and April 2021. In another
case, it emerged in May that Xu Yan, the wife of veteran rights lawyer Yu Wen-
sheng, had been charged with “inciting subversion of state power.” The couple was
detained in Beijing in April en route to a meeting with European Union (EU) officials
and arrested on charges of “picking quarrels and stirring up trouble,” a common
charge used against critics of the Communist Party. Many lawyers have been warned off representing them, and their son lives alone under strict police surveillance. Police in Chengdu prevented rights lawyer Li Heping and his family from boarding a flight to Thailand on June 9, citing national security concerns.

- **Uyghur students sentenced for sharing video of protests, using VPN:** On June 8, the Guardian reported that Kamile Wayit, a Uyghur student, had been convicted of “advocating extremism,” although the length of her sentence remains unclear. Wayit was detained by police in Xinjiang in December for sharing a video about protests against China’s zero-Covid-19 regime, and was convicted even as Han Chinese protesters and netizens who shared similar material in other parts of China were released on bail. In another case, new information emerged on June 8 that Mehmut Memtimin, a Uyghur university student, was sentenced to 13 years in prison at Tumshuq Prison, in Xinjiang. He was arrested in 2017 for using a virtual private network (VPN) to bypass censorship. News of the two sentences emerged alongside confirmation of three deaths of other Uyghurs in detention at the same prison where Mehmut Memtimin is reportedly held.

- **Indian journalists forced out, Chinese American citizen jailed on espionage charges:** On June 16, the Foreign Correspondents Club of China (FCC) lamented that India would soon have no more foreign correspondent representation in China, joining countries such as Australia and Canada whose reporters were recently expelled. The situation emerged after a reporter with the Press Trust of India was asked to leave China when his visa expired at the end of the month. Two other Indian reporters were barred from returning to China in April due to visa restrictions, and another left Beijing on June 10. The FCC's announcement came after Indian authorities rejected visas for two Chinese journalists and Beijing imposed restrictions on Indian journalists in China, including their ability to hire local correspondents and travel within the country. Chinese state media still retain a presence in India. Separately, on May 15, John Leung, a Chinese American citizen who previously had close ties to the Chinese government and CCP-linked groups in the United States, was arrested and charged with spying in China. Details of Leung's case are unclear.
HONG KONG

June 4 speech restrictions, protest anthem injunction, rare court win for journalist, youth prisoner “deradicalization”

• Pro-Beijing carnival replaces June 4 candlelight vigil, journalist arrested, other material repressed: For decades, Hong Kong was the only city in the People’s Republic of China where public commemoration of the 1989 massacre of prodemocracy protests could take place, with tens of thousands gathering in Victoria Park for a candlelight vigil. During the COVID-19 pandemic and after adoption of the National Security Law (NSL) in 2020, authorities have prohibited the vigil. This year, the location instead hosted a three-day festival organized by 26 pro-Beijing groups; police meanwhile detained at least 23 people who had disrupted “public order” by attempting to commemorate the massacre. These included two people who planned to conduct a hunger strike and two artists, one of whom shouted “Do not forget June 4!” as he was being taken away by police. Over 6,000 police were deployed to the area. At least one journalist, Mak Yin-ting, a freelancer for Radio France Internationale and former head of the Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA), was detained by police without explanation when trying to report at the carnival, though later released without charge. New caution surrounding the date was also evident when a public opinion research institute canceled at the last minute publication of an annual survey of Hong Kongers about June 4 after receiving a warning from the government. Another notably heavy-handed attempt to avoid invoking the massacre was found in Ming Pao, a prominent newspaper that celebrated the 64th anniversary of its launch on May 20. Dozens of advertisements from local and international businesses offering congratulations all made reference to moving “toward its 65th anniversary”—evidently believing that the numbers six and four recall the date of the massacre even in a wholly separate context. Despite restrictions, some Hong Kongers still chose to commemorate the 1989 crackdown with private candlelight vigils or by publicly reading books in public about the incident.

• Protest anthem injunction, concert canceled: On June 5, the Hong Kong government applied for a court injunction against the song “Glory to Hong Kong,” the unofficial anthem of the 2019 prodemocracy protests. In recent months, the song had been played as the territory’s anthem at international sporting events—apparently by accident—angering the government. After a hearing on June 12, the judge postponed consideration of the application until July 21. But media were already reporting that it was unavailable on local versions of online music stores and applications like iTunes, Spotify, and Facebook; according to one report, this was because the distributor had taken it down, not the platforms. If approved per the government’s request, the injunction would ban performing or disseminating the song, including online, within Hong Kong. Experts raised concerns over how this might be implemented and whether it would lead to broader restrictions on internet freedom, in cases where the song is hosted on a website based outside of China, for example. In another instance of cultural censorship, on May 25, the Hong Kong Convention and
Exhibition Centre canceled a concert scheduled for August of popular pro-democracy Cantopop star Anthony Wong without explanation. Wong has reportedly tried to book multiple venues but faced repeated rejections, leaving him unable to perform in Hong Kong since December 2021.

- **Journalist wins rare appeal:** On June 5, the Court of Final Appeal in Hong Kong overturned a lower-court ruling that found award-winning journalist Bao Choy guilty in April 2021 of making false statements when trying to access a government database of vehicle registration records. Choy had been working in 2019 for public broadcaster Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) and was using the records to identify attackers in a violent assault on train travelers, many of them pro-democracy protesters, at Yuen Long station. The appeals court found that her selection of “traffic and transport-related matters” as the reason for accessing the database could reasonably include “bona fide journalism,” and that a “grave injustice” had been done in convicting her. The decision was a rare win for journalists in Hong Kong at a time when many in the media industry are facing prosecution under sedition and national security laws. Indeed, two weeks after the decision, on June 19, three court of appeals judges blocked a bid by media mogul Jimmy Lai to challenge a warrant obtained by police to search the content of his mobile phones. Lai is due to face trial in September on national security charges.

- **“Deradicalization” program targets juvenile prisoners:** On June 8, the Washington Post published an investigation of the treatment of political prisoners, especially youth under the age of 21, in Hong Kong’s prisons. Drawing on interviews with prisoners, former guards, and official documents, the report outlines a deradicalization program—referred officially as “targeted rehabilitation”—that aims to change the political views of detainees. Tactics used include daily viewing of CCP propaganda videos, pro-Beijing lectures, and forced apologies, accompanied by punishments such as solitary confinement, restricted communication with family, and occasional beatings. Though relatively less violent, the endeavor is reminiscent of reeducation and “transformation” programs deployed in mainland China against dissidents, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Falun Gong practitioners.
BEYOND CHINA

Hackers target Kenya, pressure on Polish art exhibit, transnational repression against activist in Laos, Falun Gong, and Hong Kongers

- **Chinese hackers target Kenyan government, intelligence agencies:** On May 24, **Reuters** published an investigation that found Chinese state-linked hackers had targeted at least eight Kenyan government departments—including the president’s office, the foreign and finance ministries, and the intelligence services—in an apparent attempt to gain information about plans to repay debts owed to China. The intrusions reportedly began in 2019 via a spear-phishing attack and continued through at least 2022, with one email server still being accessed in February 2023. Cybersecurity experts traced the attacks to a state-linked hacking team referred to as Backdoor Diplomacy that has used similar malware to carry out intrusions in Asia and Europe.

- **Chinese free speech activist detained in Laos:** On May 31, Yang Zewei (also known by the name Qiao Xinxin) a Chinese free speech activist who launched a campaign in March to call for the end of the so-called Great Firewall (#BanGFW), lost contact with fellow activists and is believed to have been abducted from his home in the Laotian capital of Vientiane. An acquaintance visited and was told by a neighbor that two Laotian police and six Chinese officers had handcuffed Yang and taken him away. Yang, a former reporter for Radio Free Asia, had reported on Twitter in April that police in his hometown in China had been harassing his family over his activism.

- **Chinese agents attempt to get Falun Gong nonprofit’s US tax status revoked:** On May 26, the US Department of Justice announced the arrest of two Chinese men from New York working on behalf of the CCP. The pair were charged with illegally acting as unregistered foreign agents, bribery, and attempted money laundering for trying in early 2023 to bribe a purported Internal Revenue Service (IRS) official to get the tax-exempt status of a nonprofit run by Falun Gong practitioners revoked; the official was actually an undercover agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The case reflects continued repression in the United States of practitioners of Falun Gong, a spiritual practice banned and violently persecuted in China. Efforts have also included assaults on information booths, malicious lawsuits against a religious center and academic facility in New York, and harassment on university campuses. On May 25, the Falun Dafa Information Center published a report on CCP harassment of Falun Gong practitioners at US universities. The study described on-campus surveillance, censorship attempts from Chinese student associations with government ties, and textbooks containing false and demonizing propaganda against the group.

- **Hong Kongers in United Kingdom assaulted, event canceled:** On June 11, a group of Chinese individuals violently attacked pro-Hong Kong demonstrators after a rally
to mark the anniversary of 2019 prodemocracy protests in the territory. Footage of
the attack circulating on social media showed three Chinese men kicking and man-
handling a man and woman in Southampton, where police said they were investi-
gating the incident as a “hate-related assault.” One of the attackers is seen shout-
ing in Mandarin, “Hong Kong belongs to China” and waving a Chinese flag. Another
video reportedly circulated on WeChat later in which the attackers, possibly stu-
dents at the University of Southampton, bragged about the assault. Separately, in
late May, pro-Hong Kong groups reported that a local church in Guildford revoked
at the last minute permission for an educational event about Hong Kong centered
on a children’s book series, “Sheep Village,” forcing its cancellation. The books’ au-
thors, many of them speech therapists, were jailed last September under sedition
laws in Hong Kong. The church claimed that it had revoked its permission because
the community was “composed of people of different nationalities,” implying a fear
of offending Chinese members, although it has hosted other potentially politically
sensitive events including ones about Ukraine and Pakistan.

• **Chinese embassy tries to cancel dissident’s art exhibit in Poland:** The second highest
  ranking Chinese diplomat in Poland visited the Center for Contemporary Art in
  Warsaw twice, issuing firm demands that the museum’s director cancel a planned
  exhibit of Chinese Australian cartoonist Badiucao and threatening that moving
  forward would harm bilateral ties. The exhibit features the provocative artist’s work
  on a range of sensitive topics, including Hong Kong, the Tiananmen Square Mas-
  sacre, and Beijing’s close ties with Moscow in the context of the full-scale Russian
  military invasion of Ukraine. The promotional image is a painting of Xi eating
  human flesh. The embassy also reportedly sent a letter to the Polish Ministry of
  Culture and National Heritage, which partially funds the museum. The artist and
  museum publicized the censorship attempt, garnering international attention. The
  exhibit opened as planned on June 16 and will run through October 15.
FEATURED PUSHBACK

New museum and global commemorations keep June 4 memory alive

In the face of tight censorship surrounding the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre in mainland China and increasingly in Hong Kong, many around the world remain determined to keep the memory of the brutal incident alive.

On June 2, the June 4th Museum in New York opened its doors. The museum displays over 100 historical artifacts, including 30 from the 1989 event. It is the only permanent exhibition of its kind, after a similar museum in Hong Kong was closed.

On May 22, the Axel Springer Freedom Foundation installed a replica of the Pillar of Shame in Berlin. The original monument, created by Danish artist Jens Galschiot, honored the victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre and was on display at a Hong Kong university until it was removed by police in 2021.

Among overseas Chinese communities, Chinese students led vigils and rallies in Britain, while protesters outside Chinese diplomatic posts in the United States demanded accountability for the massacre and an end to the Chinese government’s repression of political dissent. Activists in Sydney organized a photo exhibition in heavily-Chinese residential areas to raise awareness about the June 4 event.

Foreign embassies in China mourned the crackdown in veiled posts on Weibo, in an attempt to circumvent censorship and express of solidarity with Chinese activists. The German embassy posted a 21-second film of a lit white candle, the British embassy uploaded a screenshot of the front page of the People's Daily on June 4, 1989, and the EU delegation shared a portrait with the caption, “We will always remember those who remember history.”
WHAT TO WATCH FOR

• **Increased arrests, censorship surrounding sensitive July dates:** Following on the heels of the June 4 Tiananmen massacre anniversary, the month of July is replete with other dates deemed sensitive to the CCP. These include July 1 (handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997), July 5 (violent suppression of Urumqi protests in 2009), July 6 (the Dalai Lama’s birthday), July 9 (2015 crackdown on rights lawyers), and July 20 (launch in 1999 of a violent persecution campaign against Falun Gong). Watch for tightened security, activist arrests, and online censorship, as well as international expressions of solidarity with victims.

• **Adoption of regulations targeting services like Apple’s AirDrop:** On June 6, the Cyber Security Administration of China (CAC) launched a month-long consultation related to draft regulations on “close-range mesh network” services, such as Apple’s AirDrop. Under the proposed rules, service providers would need to prevent the sharing of “illegal” information, require users to register with their real names, and provide data to authorities, among other actions. Watch for the outcome of the consultation, the wording of the final regulations, and their impact on dissent.

• **Next steps in Hong Kong prosecutions:** On June 18, media outlets reported that 23-year-old Yuan Ching-ting, who was arrested in Hong Kong after returning from studies in Japan, was indicted under the 2020 National Security Law. The arrest was related to social media posts about Hong Kong independence she made while in Japan. Earlier in the month, three young men were found guilty of rioting in a case centered on the 2019 police siege against protesters at Polytechnic University, which took place during the year’s prodemocracy protest movement. The court handed down sentences of up to 5 years and 2 months in prison, including against an individual who claimed to have been on the campus as a photojournalist. Watch for the next stages in these cases, including the extraterritorial implications of Yuan’s prosecution, as well as developments related to Jimmy Lai’s trial, scheduled for September.
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](https://www.freedomhouse.org) or e-mail cmb@freedomhouse.org.

• **Share the China Media Bulletin:** Help friends and colleagues better understand China’s changing media and censorship landscape.

• **Access uncensored content:** Find an overview comparing popular circumvention tools and information on how to access them via GreatFire.org, [here](https://www.freedomhouse.org) or [here](https://www.freedomhouse.org). Learn more about how to reach uncensored content and enhance digital security [here](https://www.freedomhouse.org).

• **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](https://www.freedomhouse.org).

• **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](https://www.freedomhouse.org) on the Freedom House website.

---

**For more information**

• For archives, go to: www.freedomhouse.org/China-media