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A staff member at the print shop for the Hong Kong edition of The Epoch Times puts out the a started by four masked men on Nov. 19, 2019.

Camera



GREG WOOD/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

CHINESE INFLUENCE

Chinese Spy Defects to Australia, Reveals Vast Influence Operations

Wang Liqiang said he was motivated to defect after realizing the Chinese regime's harm to worldwide democracy

LEO TIMM

A man claiming to be a Chinese military intelligence agent has defected to Australia, bringing with him a wealth of insider knowledge that backs up longstanding concerns about Beijing's attempts to subvert and undermine its opponents abroad.

Wang Liqiang revealed an "unprecedented" trove of information on how the communist Chinese regime funds and directs operations to sabotage the democratic movement in Hong Kong, meddle in Taiwanese elections, and infiltrate Australian political circles, according to reports on Nov. 22 by Nine Network newspapers, an Australian media group.

In an earlier interview with The Epoch Times, the 27-year-old talked about how he had become disillusioned by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) totalitarian agenda, leading to his decision to defect in May.

He is the first Chinese spy to go public with his identity. "As I grew older and my worldview changed, I gradually realized the damage that the CCP's authoritarianism was doing to democracy and human rights around the world," Wang said. "My opposition to the Party and communism became ever-clearer, so I made plans to leave this organization."

In April, Wang left Hong Kong for Sydney, where his wife and child live, and presented his material to the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), the country's top intelligence agency. He is now staying in a secret location as he cooperates with the agency.

"I have personally been involved and participated in a series of espionage activities," Wang told ASIO under oath in October.

From Artist to Agent

Wang hails from Fujian, the southeast Chinese province across the strait from democratic Taiwan, according to a statement he provided to The Epoch Times. The son of a local Communist Party official, Wang had a middle-class upbringing and majored in oil painting at the Anhui University of Finance and Economics. Photos from Wang's time in school show awards he won for his artwork.

At the end of his education, a senior university official suggested that Wang should work at China Innovation Investment Limited (CIIL), a Hong Kong-based company specializing in technology, finance, and media. In 2014, Wang began working with the firm.

While CIIL presents itself as an

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investment firm focusing on listed and unlisted Chinese defense assets, Wang soon discovered that it was a major front for the Party's overseas espionage, serving multiple Chinese security organs and CCP officials.

Wang got in the good graces of CIIL CEO Xiang Xin and entered the "inner sanctum" of the company, Nine Network reported, by giving Xin's wife painting lessons. That gave him wide access to information about both ongoing and past cases of Chinese intelligence operations, much of it connected to the Party's acquisition of military technology.

During the 2018 "nine-in-one" regional elections in Taiwan, Wang had helped coordinate a massive disinformation campaign by the CCP to undermine the administration of Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen. He had traveled to Taiwan on a forged South Korean passport, where he took part in coordinating on-the-ground operations.

Meanwhile, Wang was also responsible for working with mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong to maintain ideological influence over them and recruit them for various intelligence-related tasks.

In comments to Nine Network, Wang went into detail about how he and other operatives infiltrated "all universities, including students' associations and other students' groups and bodies."

He said it was simple to recruit mainland Chinese students, who could often be "given some petty favors and benefits," in exchange for their help.

Influence Operations

As a Chinese citizen brought up to believe that being a patriot meant protecting the CCP's rule, Wang thought that working as a spy for the regime was an attractive prospect. "It paid well, and I also felt that I was

doing things for the country," he told the outlet.

Peter Mattis, a former CIA analyst and an expert on Chinese espionage, told the outlet that Wang was probably a "cut-out" or "co-optee," that is, a person who works as an aide to an intelligence officer by "building up a suite of resources to use for intelligence or political influence."

Wang indicated that many major media in Hong Kong and Taiwan had been bought or infiltrated by CCP operatives to carry the Party's narratives.

For example, "a senior manager at a major Asian television network is a current military cadre with a Division Commander rank" in the People's Liberation Army, he told Nine newspapers.

He also corroborated reports that the Communist Party had built a formidable network of influence in Australia by co-opting politicians and political parties, as well as working among ethnic Chinese students to draw out dissent to the mainland regime's policies.

"Mr. Wang provided bank account transactions to back his claims" that CCP intelligence organs "had dealings with several significant Australian political donors, including a one-time staffer in a federal MP's office," the outlet reported.

Chen Yonglin, a former Chinese diplomat who defected to Australia in 2005, had warned the country early on about the subversive influence of Beijing's agents, saying that the CCP had 1,000 spies active in Australia at the time. Back then, one of the Party's main priorities was to defame and marginalize practitioners of Falun Gong, a Chinese spiritual discipline banned by the CCP in 1999.

In 2017, revelations of CCP influence operations in the country made the headlines, including allegations of Chinese billionaires using dona-

tions to influence politicians on behalf of the regime.

Australia passed laws in 2018 to combat foreign interference, which were introduced in the wake of what then-Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull described as "disturbing reports of Chinese influence." Modeled on similar laws in the United States, the laws created new espionage offenses, set up a register for foreign agents, and banned foreign political donations.

Earlier this year, the country stripped Chinese billionaire Huang Xiaomo of his permanent resident status and denied him citizenship, marking the first direct action against a suspected CCP-influenced agent since the laws were introduced.

Huang, a real estate developer, had reportedly donated AU\$2.7 million (\$1.94 million) to major Australian political parties over the past five years, and has close ties to the CCP. He was president of the Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (PPRC Australia), a group under the umbrella of the United Front Work Department, a CCP agency tasked with spreading Beijing's agenda overseas.

Australian Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said the implications of Wang's account are "very disturbing" and that government law agencies were dealing with the matter, Reuters reported.

The Chinese regime has rejected Wang's account, with police in Shanghai claiming he wasn't an operative, but an unemployed 26-year-old who had previously been jailed for fraud.

The Chinese Embassy added in a statement on Nov. 24 that Wang is wanted in connection with a fraud case from earlier this year.

"On April 19, 2019, the Shanghai police opened an investigation into Wang, who allegedly cheated 4.6 million yuan from a person surnamed Shu through a fake investment project involving car import in February," the statement said.

The embassy said Wang left for Hong Kong on April 10, carrying a fake Chinese passport and a fake Hong Kong permanent resident ID, adding that Shanghai police were investigating the matter.

Leaving the Party

According to Nine Network, Wang's internal struggle reached a turning point when he received a fake South Korean passport, with which he was to enter Taiwan and participate in the CCP's ongoing attempts to interfere in the 2020 presidential race. The island is set to go to the polls in January.

"Staring at his own face in the false passport stirred something in Wang," the outlet reported. "He realized he was at risk of losing himself. As he would later write, he was on the cusp of becoming 'a person without a real identity.'"

On April 23, Wang left his post in Hong Kong to visit his wife and baby son in Sydney, having been granted approval by his boss's wife.

For Wang, betraying the Communist Party, knowing that he might never be able to return to China or see his relatives, wasn't an easy decision to make.

"Whenever I think of this, I am very sad. My family, not only my parents, but also my grandparents... I dare not communicate much, as our phones are tapped. This is the saddest thing... My heart is extremely sad, and no words can express my grief," Wang told Nine Network.

However, he ultimately believed espionage was too risky and immoral for him to continue.

"I thought and rethought it time and time again," Wang told The Epoch Times. "I wondered if this decision would be a good thing or a bad thing for my life. I couldn't tell you definitively, but I firmly believe that if I had stayed with [the CCP], I would come to no good end."

Wang's decision was also informed by his experiences living in democratic societies. In addition to Taiwan, he had previously visited his family in Australia in December 2018.

"Over the few months I spent in Australia, I experienced the democratic freedoms of this country and felt more and more ashamed of what the CCP was doing to undermine democracy around the world," he said. "So I decided to completely abandon my work and make a clean break with the Party."

ANALYSIS

Why a

Chinese Marble Producer

Should Alarm Investors

Unsuspecting Western investors could be burned by passive index funds

FAN YU

News Analysis

U.S. investors should pay attention to something bizarre that happened on Nov. 21 at the Hong Kong stock exchange.

The stock of Hong Kong-listed marble producer ArtGo Holdings Ltd. plunged 98 percent from its closing price on Nov. 20, before trading was suspended by the exchange.

ArtGo's sudden and spectacular collapse in share price was preceded by a period of equally dramatic rise. Its stock soared almost 3,800 percent this year—becoming the largest gainer in the world among companies of at least \$1 billion in valuation.

So what happened?

Apparently, a day earlier, global index provider MSCI Inc. announced that it would no longer add ArtGo to its global stock indices because of concerns over the company's "investability," after "further analysis and feedback from market participants." The action spooked investors on Nov. 21, the next trading day, who deemed the company to be worth only about 2 percent of its previous value, assuming its addition to MSCI's global indices.

MSCI's about-face came two weeks after the New York-based index provider announced it would add ArtGo to its indices.

The Power of Indices

How much should U.S. investors care about an arcane marble miner that's traded in Hong Kong?

Plenty. Due to the central role index providers such as MSCI play in today's market structure, U.S. investors could be unknowingly investing in obscure companies such as ArtGo and others in their retirement accounts and investment portfolios.

It's probably hyperbolic to describe that 98 percent of ArtGo's value rested upon its inclusion in MSCI's global stock indices. But the dramatic rise and fall underscores the market influence of index providers such as MSCI in the age of passive investing. Fortunately, MSCI was notified of

something not right about ArtGo, whose recent astonishing gains weren't representative of its underlying financial condition.

MSCI and other stock index providers such as FTSE Russell, S&P, Dow Jones, and CRSP (Center for Research in Security Prices) operate coveted stock indices to track the performance of a group of stocks, based on an industry, a region, or some other criteria. Depending on the specific index, companies must meet basic requirements such as minimum market capitalization (valuation), float size, liquidity/volume, or governance characteristics such as voting rights granted to shareholders.

Why are indices important? Many exchange-traded funds (ETFs) and passive investment funds directly track or mimic stock indices, meaning their strategy is to buy the constituent stocks of these stock indices and match their performance. The dominance of low-cost ETFs and Vanguard funds, whose late founder, Jack Bogle, popularized low-cost index investing, in recent years have become a key discussion topic about the stock market.

Retail investors have poured far more money into such passive funds than active funds—those whose investment managers "actively" manage or pick individual investments—in recent years, due to the relatively low cost of such strategies.

Assets in passive domestic stock funds grew to \$4.3 trillion as of April 2019, on par with actively managed fund assets for the first time in history, according to Institutional Investor magazine.

Over the past two years, MSCI and its peers have been adding more Hong Kong and mainland China-listed stocks in its global indices.

Low Bar for Qualification

Most stock indices have minimum qualifications for companies to be included, such as market cap, liquidity, and shareholder rights, to name just a few.

But what indices don't care about is underlying economics and financial health. One can argue that truly terrible financial health would be de-

structive to market cap and therefore a company's qualification, but that's a reactive response. Stock indices for the most part simply pay no attention to the quality of a company's business model, profitability, management team, quality or durability of revenue streams, or most other tangible, subjective measures of success.

Investors traditionally deemed those qualities as paramount in evaluating whether to invest in a company's stock. But for index operators, as long as a company meets some basic requirements, it's in.

So investors in funds that rely on such indices should know that unlike actively managed funds, indices don't look after their financial interests.

Blindly Following Indices

A main thesis for investing in index funds is that for most amateur investors, it's too hard to pick individual stocks to "beat the market." The trend also is fueled by the fact that most actively managed stock funds haven't been able to outperform the market in recent years, despite their relatively high fees. So for retail investors, it may be more advantageous to simply perform in line with the market by investing in low-cost passive funds or ETFs that track market indices.

That's why passive investment managers such as BlackRock, State Street, and Vanguard have seen their assets under management balloon in recent years.

But without active stock pickers who analyze companies and uncover high or low performers, companies such as ArtGo may be bought up by funds blindly following indices. And the stock price of such firms may not be commensurate with their financial reality. It's anyone's guess how many other ArtGo-like firms are lurking in Chinese stock markets.

This may be a low enough risk in mature, efficient markets such as those in the United States. But in the Wild West of Chinese stock markets—where company financials are often a black box and foreign regulators are forbidden from examining audit reports—the risk is too great to ignore.

And unsuspecting retail investors will stand to lose.

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WILLIAM WEST/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

(Top) Chen Yonglin, who abandoned his post as first secretary at the Chinese consulate-general in Sydney and defected to Australia in 2005, speaks at a press conference in Sydney, on July 10, 2005.

(Right) People walk through Sydney's Chinatown on June 21, 2017.



APP PHOTO/KUN CHENG

A woman walks past a display of the Hang Seng Index at a bank in Hong Kong on June 29, 2016.



Staff at the print shop for the Hong Kong edition of The Epoch Times react to a fire started by four masked men on Nov. 19, 2019.

PRESS FREEDOM

US Senators Condemn Arson Attack on Hong Kong Epoch Times Printing Press

EVA FU

U.S. senators on Nov. 19 condemned an arson attack on the Hong Kong Epoch Times' printing shop, saying it was part of a "disturbing trend" and the latest evidence that the Chinese regime won't uphold its promise to allow autonomy in the territory.

The lawmakers made the comments shortly after the Senate unanimously passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, which they said would be a strong message to Beijing that suppression and violence aren't the answer to the people of Hong Kong. Protesters have taken to the streets since June to oppose what they see as Beijing's steady erosion of the city's basic freedoms.

Hong Kong reverted from British to Chinese rule in 1997 under the express guarantee that its autonomy would be preserved.

In the early hours on Nov. 19 local time, four masked assailants, including two carrying batons, carried containers filled with a flammable liquid into the printing warehouse of the Hong Kong edition of The Epoch Times. They poured the liquid onto the floor, printing machines, and nearby stacks of papers, before setting it on fire. The incident is suspected to be the latest intimidation tactic of the Chinese Communist Party to discourage The Epoch Times from reporting on topics that could be sensitive to the Chinese regime.

Suppressing freedom of speech and freedom of the press is the right task of tyrants, and I think that's exactly what they're trying to do.

John Cornyn, U.S. senator

The Nov. 20, 2019, edition of 10 Hong Kong newspapers, seven of which carried pro-Beijing advertisements. The Epoch Times Hong Kong edition is at the top row, center.

The Epoch Times has been a leading voice in independent reporting on the protests in Hong Kong in recent months.

Senators' Reactions
In response to the incident, Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) said, "Any assault on the freedom of the press is an assault of the liberty that was promised to the people of Hong Kong."

"It's an assault to the basic function of a democracy," Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) said that he was "not surprised," but "very disappointed" to see such actions taking place.

"Suppressing freedom of speech and freedom of the press is the first task of tyrants, and I think that's exactly what they're trying to do," he said.

Sen. Ben Cardin (D-Md.) said that the fire served as an example of the "impetus" for him and his colleagues to pass the bill. He went on to note the ongoing suppression of religious minorities in China, including Muslim-practicing Uyghurs and other minorities in the northwestern region of Xinjiang, and of freedom of expression—all of which "has been very much in the wrong direction in China."

"Only a totalitarian regime is afraid of what is written by the press," Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) said. "If you have truth on your side, you're never afraid about being written by the press. That in and of itself is another concerning violation of the type

of basic rights we support in the United States."

The fire damaged two printing machines, four rolls of printing paper, and several stacks of newspapers in the facility. A day after the attack, some machines were still being repaired, and the amount of the loss from the fire was yet to be assessed.

Intimidation
Cheryl Ng, a spokesperson for the Hong Kong edition, said the attack was a "crime against press freedom in Hong Kong" and suggested it was yet another intimidation tactic from the Chinese regime.

In Hong Kong, there has long been a pattern of physical and verbal attacks on pro-democracy activists or vocal critics of the Chinese regime.

On the same day as the arson attack, at around 7 p.m., several masked men assaulted former lawmaker Albert Ho with clubs, injuring his head, back, and both arms. The incident lasted for several minutes, according to local media.

Ho is the chairman of a pro-democracy group called the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China, and former chairman of the Democratic Party. He was discharged from the hospital after undergoing surgery.

"We are one of the newspapers that really gives out the truth and really reports the real situation here," Ng said.

The Hong Kong branch has for years been a target of the Chinese Communist Party for its extensive and truthful coverage that's been critical of the regime.

In September 2006, for example, local intelligence agents kidnapped a computer technician working for the Hong Kong edition while he was visiting Zhuhai City, Guangdong Province in mainland China; he was forced to become a special agent and sabotage the Hong Kong Epoch Times.

Earlier this year, the popular chain store 7-Eleven abruptly removed the Hong Kong edition's newspaper from its shelves without an explanation, even as sales well exceeded the minimum target. The chain's 500 stores had been the paper's chief distribution channel. Cédric Alviani, East Asia bureau director at Reporters Without Borders, said at the time that they "can't see any reason but the pressure from the Chinese au-

thorities for this withdrawal."

The Hong Kong Journalists Association condemned the arson attack and called on the police to "seriously handle" the fire incident.

Chris Yeung, chairperson of the association, said in an interview that the attack was a "direct threat" to the press, and urged a strong message from the government that such conduct is "absolutely unacceptable."

"It's an exceptionally violent conduct and a serious breach of the law," Yeung told The Epoch Times. "In similar incidents targeting the media in the past, it seems that the government had not been able to quickly make a breakthrough in the investigation, and this actually is condoning the increasingly serious illegal activities."

Moving Forward

The incident wasn't the first time the printing operations have been attacked. In February 2006, four thugs broke into the factory and smashed a plate-making machine worth 1 million Hong Kong dollars (about \$128,000), forcing the factory to temporarily suspend operations.

The director of the Hong Kong edition, Guo Jun, said that the paper wouldn't back down despite the threats. After the arson attack, the Hong Kong edition published its Nov. 20 issue as scheduled.

That day, seven out of 10 major Hong Kong newspapers ran a front-page advertisement that portrayed protesters as rioters. The same ad, appealing to voters to "oppose rioting" ahead of local district elections to be held Nov. 24, also appeared on front pages of at least six newspapers on Nov. 12, the morning after police had fired about 3,000 rounds of tear gas and other projectiles on a university campus.

Pro-democracy activist Ho suggested that the arson showed a growing recognition of the newspaper's role as an independent voice.

"If you are not successful and influential, others won't see the need to deal with you," Ho said in an interview. "Because your words are powerful, some people are feeling pressured or threatened, and thus they want to scare you and make you back down."

Emel Akan contributed to this report.

Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act: A Battle Between Good & Evil

JAMES GORRIE

Commentary

Both President Donald Trump and China leader Xi Jinping have some tough decisions to make regarding Hong Kong and the ongoing trade war. For one, both houses of Congress have passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019. The bill is now headed to Trump's desk for his signature.

Will he sign it?

A Question of Good Versus Evil

The battle between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong is fundamentally a contest between good and evil. The world needs to stand up against China's massive threat of oppression against the people of Hong Kong. To his credit, Trump has very publicly—and correctly—voiced his support of the protesters, saying, "I stand with Hong Kong. I stand with freedom." And just as importantly, he has linked the outcome of U.S. trade negotiations with China's treatment of the Hong Kong protesters.

But, Trump also added, "But we are also in the process of making the largest trade deal in history. And if we could do that, that would be great." Trump's second statement would seem to cast doubt on his support for Congress' so-called "Hong Kong bill."

Is Trump vacillating?
Not really.

If the Hong Kong bill becomes law, it will require the United States to impose sanctions against China and Hong Kong for human rights abuses. It will also force an annual review by the U.S. State Department and others to determine if Hong Kong's political status under China merits renewing Hong Kong's special trade status for the coming year. In other words, it has teeth.

Not surprisingly, China was angered over the passage of the bill, claiming that it "seriously violated international law and basic norms governing international relations. China condemns and firmly opposes it."

But will—or should—Trump sign the bill?

It actually works to Trump's advantage if he does not sign the bill. Since it is veto-proof, the bill could become law whether he signs it or not. That lets Trump off the hook and still yet codifies U.S. sanctions against China and the annual review of

The American people, through their elected representatives, have taken a stand directly against China and for the people of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's special status.

Beijing won't like it, but Trump can just shrug his shoulders and say, "that's the way our American republic works."

What Are China's Options?

What will China do if the bill becomes law? They could certainly decide to pull out of the trade negotiations. They could also send in the military to put an end to the politically embarrassing protests in Hong Kong, or both. The United States could not stop China from doing either of those things.

But China has its own balancing act to perform. It's clear, for example, that the CCP leadership is keenly aware of the high costs of cracking down on Hong Kong. That's precisely why the military has largely remained in its barracks.

It's also evident that China's economy is the worst in 30 years, and with it the CCP's political legitimacy. And with a potential real estate meltdown on the horizon, Beijing needs all the relief it can get.

The fact is that China needs a deal more than the United States does—at least at this point—if only to avoid the next round of tariffs, which are significant and imminent. If no deal is reached by mid-December, the Trump administration is prepared to impose new tariffs on another \$160 billion worth of imports from China, including popular consumer items such as cell phones and laptops.

That would be another big blow to an already battered Chinese economy.

Trump Coming to Farmers' Aid

That's not to say that the U.S. economy remains unscathed. Farmers have taken the brunt of the trade war damage so far.

In response, President Trump has helped American soy bean farmers and other agricultural producers with \$16 billion in aid from the Commodity Credit Organization, which was founded in the Great Depression to help farmers stabilize production in unstable market conditions. It's likely much more aid will be necessary.

China Wary About Helping Trump

At the same time, China doesn't want to give Trump a political win that would help his re-election chances. They would much prefer that Trump is defeated in 2020.

China's intentions going forward may well be to allow Trump a symbolic vic-

tory only. They would agree to an initial deal to avoid the scheduled tariffs, but then refuse to live up to the deal in key areas such as enforcing IP protections and allowing greater market access. That's been the modus operandi since joining the World Trade Organization in 2000 and it has served them well.

Why should they change a winning tactic?

It could be easily accomplished since phase one of the trade deal doesn't really get to the heart of structural issues. Besides, China's economy can scarcely afford to lose more than it already has.

100 Flowers Campaign 2.0 in Hong Kong?

With regard to the Hong Kong bill and the ongoing protest, China may continue to apply graduated responses to the problem. Or, we may be watching a 21st-century version of Mao's 100 Flowers Campaign, begun back in 1956.

The 100 Flowers strategy encouraged intellectuals, students and others with complaints against the CCP to freely express them. Once the identities of the "poisonous weeds" were known, the CCP removed them from society to be re-educated or worse.

If that's part of Beijing's thinking, it would make some sense for it to happen after the 2020 election.

US and China on Collision Course

Can the CCP endure the risks of waiting that long? Or will the CCP leadership feel so threatened that they lose their cool and send in the tanks?

That remains to be seen. Either scenario is plausible.

What's more than plausible, however, is that the American people, through their elected representatives, have taken a stand directly against China and for the people of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019 will become law.

That in itself puts the United States and China on a collision course that's been a long time in coming. But as much as Beijing howls in protest, there's not a thing that they can do about it.

James Gorrie is a writer and speaker based in Southern California. He is the author of "The China Crisis."

Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.



THE EPOCH TIMES



President Donald Trump makes his way to board Air Force One at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland on Nov. 20, 2019.

CHINESE INFLUENCE

Shen Yun Faces Unrelenting Interference Campaign by Chinese Communist Regime

CATHY HE

Shen Yun is not your ordinary performing arts company. Every year, the company not only contends with the challenges of bringing a high-end stage production to hundreds of cities around the world, but also must deal with an unrelenting campaign by the Chinese communist regime to interfere with its performances wherever it goes.

This interference has plagued the company since its founding more than a decade ago, Leeshai Lemish, an emcee with the company, told *The Epoch Times*.

Shen Yun Performing Arts is a classical Chinese dance and music company founded in New York in 2006. Its mission, according to its website, is to revive 5,000 years of traditional Chinese culture through the arts.

Its performances include depictions of the Chinese regime's two-decade-long persecution of the spiritual practice Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa. Under the persecution, adherents of the practice have been arbitrarily detained, subjected to forced labor, tortured, and even killed for their organs. Outside China, the regime has sought to demonize the practice while suppressing information exposing the persecution, such as by influencing overseas Chinese media and infiltrating overseas Chinese community groups.

Lemish, who has been an emcee with Shen Yun since its inception, said, "I started noticing that as we were going and performing around the world, there are all types of phenomena that were following us that you normally would not expect with a performing arts company."

Theaters received letters from their local Chinese consulate or embassy demanding that they pull the performance, he said. Chinese individuals were seen loitering around the company's buses and accommodation, appearing to be monitoring the company's movements. Some attendees attempted to disrupt the company's performances using electronic devices, such as a universal remote control to interfere with the screen projector.

"We knew that ... there were forces behind the scenes trying to stop our performances," he said.

So the emcee began collecting letters and documentation cataloging these incidents, and now has a list of 74 sabotage attempts since early 2007—and the number is still growing.

"It's just a drop in the bucket in terms of what is actually out there," Lemish said, adding that as he tours, people with inside information on the theaters' dealings are constantly telling him in private of attempts by Chinese authorities to shut down the performances.

Shen Yun Performances Denied

Attempts by the Chinese regime to thwart Shen Yun's performances have largely failed—the company has expanded to seven touring contingents and is due to embark on its biggest touring season yet in 2020. But there have been some cases of theaters folding to the pressure.

Most recently, the Royal Theater in Madrid canceled the show a few weeks before the company was due to perform for the first time at the venue in January, citing "technical difficulties."

However, an undercover phone call to the Chinese Embassy in Madrid conducted by the U.S.-based nonprofit World Organization to Investigate the Persecution



The curtain call for Shen Yun Performing Arts at the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center in New York on Jan 11, 2015.

of Falun Gong (WOIPFG) revealed that this reason was manufactured after the embassy managed to pressure the theater into dropping the performance. The caller, posing as a high-level official of the Chinese regime, talked to a man who identified himself as Lu Fan, the Chinese ambassador to Spain, according to a WOIPFG press release at the time.

In an audio recording of the phone conversation, Lu explained how he convinced the Royal Theater's general manager to cancel Shen Yun by warning him that the theater "can't afford to lose the Chinese market because of this."

In Denmark, a 2018 investigative report by local media Radio-24syv uncovered evidence that the Chinese Embassy had placed pressure on the Royal Danish Theater in Copenhagen to not lease its venue to Shen Yun.

The New York-based company had sought to perform at the Royal Danish Theater for 10 years but had been repeatedly rejected on grounds that the company's artistic level did not meet the venue's demands.

According to emails obtained by the outlet, one of the theater's employees told another staff member that they had met with the Chinese Embassy in August 2017.

"They [embassy] ended the meeting by asking if we had a dialogue with Shen Yun, and requested that we shouldn't allow them to rent our facilities," the email stated.

Thomas Foght, the journalist who investigated the story, said during a speech at the Danish Parliament in April this year that this case "puts light on why it was so difficult for Shen Yun to have access to the Royal Theater over



2009 SHEN YUN PERFORMING ARTS

developments in these investigations.

Theaters have also received emails from people posing as fans of the show or as the local hosting organization. The emails, which the theaters subsequently shared with Shen Yun, contained content that made them "come across as zealous and crazy," Lemish said.

The purpose was to "scare the theater from having anything to do with us," he said.

Shen Yun's website and servers also have repeatedly come under attack, Lemish said, adding that assaults on its ticketing platforms tend to be concentrated during the lead-up to the company's performances in New York, where it typically has an extended run at the prestigious Lincoln Center.

Recently, the interference has increasingly moved online.

"There's a very strategic and concerted effort to defame us in any possible way, especially in the media and online," Lemish said.

He said that Chinese internet trolls have been working to get negative publicity about Shen Yun ranked higher than the company's website and media articles with favorable reviews of the performance. Known as the "50-Cent Army," these internet trolls are paid by the Chinese regime to spout propaganda and silence dissenting views online, both inside and outside of China.

"There is an attempt now by these 50-cent people to basically bolster the ranking [of negative publicity] by commenting on ... [those articles], leaving nasty remarks and perhaps linking to them," Lemish said. "They'll do all these different things that can improve SEO ranking for these articles."

The emcee said this move fits within the Chinese regime's broader campaign to shift public opinion online internationally.

We're not going to be intimidated by it. We've faced this all along from the very beginning. It's never slowed us down.

Leeshai Lemish, Shen Yun emcee

"It's making us work a lot harder because just the normal way that people discover things these days [is] by Googling them and by hearing about them ... on social media," he said.

"They're really making a strong effort to not allow us to use those channels, and then create negative impressions on people to make it harder for us to sell tickets."

However, the company is undeterred.

"We're not going to be intimidated by it," Lemish said. "We've faced this all along from the very beginning. It's never slowed us down."

Epoch Times reporter Janita Kan contributed to this report.

"Flowing Sleeves," from the 2009 Shen Yun Performing Arts program.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Rights Group Condemns China for Torturing Hong Kong UK Consulate Staff

FRANK FANG

Hong Kong citizen Simon Cheng's account of being subjected to torture while in Chinese custody details a common tactic by Beijing, according to Amnesty International, which has condemned the Chinese regime's intimidation actions.

"The horrific abuse Simon Cheng described in his testimony, such as being shackled and placed in stress positions, is in line with the endemic torture and other ill-treatment in detention we have repeatedly documented in mainland China," Patrick Poon, a China researcher for the human-rights organization, said in a Nov. 20 press release.

"This appears to be a callous attempt by Chinese state officials to intimidate anyone perceived to be linked to the Hong Kong protests, and chillingly illustrates the inherent dangers of the proposed extradition bill that sparked the unrest in the first place," he said.

Poon called on Chinese authorities to investigate and hold any police responsible for Cheng's torture and other ill-treatment.

Cheng, 28, a staffer at Hong Kong's British consulate office, went missing in early August after traveling to Shenzhen, the mainland Chinese city that borders Hong Kong, to attend a business event.

On Aug. 21, China's foreign ministry confirmed that he was being held under 15-day administrative detention in Shenzhen on suspicion of violating China's Public Security Administration Punishment Law, which renders punishment for those who "disturb public order" or "endanger public safety."

Cheng was released on Aug. 24. He detailed how he was physically abused while in Chinese custody, in a recent Facebook post.

"I was hung (handcuffed and shackled) on a steep X-Cross doing a spread-eagled pose for hours after hours," Cheng wrote.

"Sometimes, they ordered me to do the 'stress tests,' which includes extreme strength exercise such as 'squat' and 'chair pose' for countless hours. They beat me every time I failed to do so using something like sharpened batons."

"I was suspected of being a mastermind and British proxy to incite



ANTHONY WALLACE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Cheng said he saw 10 young 'criminal suspects' being interrogated at the detention center [in mainland China], whom he suspected to be Hong Kong protesters.

and organize the protests in Hong Kong," he wrote. Chinese state media and Beijing officials have consistently pushed the narrative that the current pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong are fomented by foreign countries.

He wrote that he was filmed while reciting a forced written confession. He was pressured into saying that he "betrayed the motherland" and "solicited prostitution," the charge Chinese authorities placed on him.

On Nov. 21, Chinese state media published Cheng's video confession. Authorities threatened Cheng that he would be taken to China again if he spoke publicly about his experience in detention, according to his post.

Cheng wrote that a secret police officer told him that "batches after batches of Hong Kong protesters had been caught, delivered, and detained in mainland China," though the claim could not be verified. Cheng also said he saw 10 young "criminal suspects" being interrogated at the detention center, whom he suspected to be Hong Kong protesters.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab summoned China's ambassador and expressed "outrage at the brutal and disgraceful treatment of Cheng in violation of China's international obligations," according to a Nov. 20 government press release.

Meanwhile, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang, at a daily press conference on Nov. 20, claimed that the police "guaranteed all his lawful rights" when Cheng was detained.

Ongoing protests in Hong Kong were ignited by opposition to an extradition bill, since withdrawn, that would have allowed the Chinese regime to transfer individuals from Hong Kong to face trial in China's courts, which are notorious for the absence of rule of law.

Protesters have since broadened their demands to call on the city government to fulfill universal suffrage and conduct an independent investigation into police use of force against demonstrators.

Patrick Nip, Hong Kong's constitutional and mainland affairs minister, said Hongkongers could reach out to the city government for assistance if they encounter troubles in China, in response to a media question about Cheng's account of torture on Nov. 20, according to Hong Kong media.

U.S. Rep. Jim Banks (R-Ind.), in a Nov. 20 tweet about Cheng's torture, wrote: "Concentration camps, no free press, torture of non-Chinese citizens, 'social credit' system, 24/7 surveillance."

Banks added: "The #HongKong protests are giving America, and the free world, a glimpse into what life is like under the thumb of Chinese Communist Party."

Activists hold signs outside the British Consulate General Hong Kong building on Aug. 21, 2019, following reports that one of its employees had been detained by mainland Chinese authorities.



BILLY HC. KWOK/GETTY IMAGES

Police go after protesters and students after they tried to flee outside the Hong Kong Polytechnic University campus in Hong Kong on Nov. 19, 2019.



Thank You.

Thanksgiving is a time for sharing
A time to be with friends and family.
A time to share a warm holiday dinner and then
gather around the television for the big game.

Today we want to share our heartfelt thanks.
On behalf of everyone at The Epoch Times,
thank you for allowing us to share honest,
traditional journalism with you.
It's an honor to serve you.

*Happy Thanksgiving
from all of us at The Epoch Times!*