

WEEK 10, 2021

THE EPOCH TIMES

# CHINA INSIDER



# SYSTEMATIC RAPE

A CAMPAIGN TO  
ELIMINATE FAITH

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## HUMAN RIGHTS

# Mass Rape, Sexual Abuse: Communist China's Genocidal Tool to Eliminate Faith

Regardless of their ages, the CCP is persecuting spiritual believers of all faiths under the disguise of 're-educating' them.

JOCELYN NEO

As the world is celebrating International Women's Day, let's not forget the horrifying abuses that mothers and sisters, and even grandmothers, are subjected to in the land of communist China.

Since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in 1949, it has been employing unethical ways to persecute citizens and suppress spiritual groups. Recently, several reports have confirmed how the CCP is using sexual abuse as a tool for re-educating and transforming prisoners of faith, regardless of their age.

Rooted in atheism and materialism, the communist regime has been brutally suppressing Uyghur Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners for years. Those who refuse to comply with the CCP's orders are detained and taken to secretive "re-education camps" where they are subjected to unimaginable abuses, including gang rape and electrocution.

## Sexual Abuse of Uyghurs

To condemn the CCP's grave human rights violations, the Trump-era administration said on Jan. 19, 2021, that the communist regime has committed "genocide" and "crimes against humanity" in its repression of the Uyghurs Muslims.

The then-U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement that the CCP has incarcerated over a million Uyghurs, subjecting them to forced labor, forced sterilizations, and torture.

**I will never forget the feeling of helplessness, of not being able to help her. After that happened, it was hard for me to sleep at night.**

Sayragul Sauytbay, witness

"After careful examination of the available facts, I have determined that the PRC [People's Republic of China], under the direction and control of the CCP, has committed genocide against the predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang," Pompeo said. He added, "I believe this genocide is ongoing, and that we are witnessing the systematic attempt to destroy Uyghurs by the Chinese party-state."

Two weeks later, the BBC published a detailed report on the systematic sexual torture happening in Xinjiang's tightly-guarded re-education network. The report that is based on first-hand interviews of several Uyghurs who were previously detained in the internment camps revealed the torture and gang-rape horrors they witnessed or lived through.

Tursunay Ziawudun, 42, who fled to the United States after escaping from Xinjiang following her release, recounted to the BBC the sexual abuses she underwent and witnessed while detained for nine months in China's secretive camps in Xinjiang.

Ziawudun, who is married to a Kazakh

RUSLAN PRYANKOV/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Gulzira Auelkhan, who spent close to two years trapped in China, speaks during an AFP interview at the office of the Ata Jurt rights group in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on Jan. 21, 2019. She is pictured with her 5-year-old daughter.



Reenactment of one of the brutal torture methods employed by the CCP officials to coerce female Falun Gong adherents to renounce their faith.

and had returned to Xinjiang for work in 2016 after staying in Kazakhstan for five years, detailed how she was shocked with an electric baton and "gang-raped on three occasions," the BBC reported.

"The woman took me to the room next to where the other girl had been taken in," Ziawudun told the BBC. "They had an electric stick, I didn't know what it was, and it was pushed inside my genital tract, torturing me with an electric shock."

"They don't only rape but also bite all over your body, you don't know if they are human or animal," she said. "They didn't spare any part of the body, they bit everywhere leaving horrible marks. It was disgusting to look at ... And it is not just one person who torments you, not just one predator. Each time they were two or three men."

Talking to Fox News, Ziawudun said: "Any woman under 40 was raped. Every one in the camp experienced this ... I was also beaten—I was kicked and stamped on—once so much on my private parts that I was bleeding, and I since had to have my ovaries removed."

The BBC report said that even the elderly women detainees were not spared. Ziawudun recalled seeing an elderly Uyghur woman being humiliated.

"They stripped everything off the elderly lady, leaving her with just her underwear. She was so embarrassed that she tried to cover herself with her arms," Ziawudun told BBC. "I cried so much watching the way they treated her. Her tears fell like rain."

Ziawudun's claims were backed by Qelbinur Sedik, an Uzbek woman from Xinjiang who was coerced to teach the Chinese language to the internment-camp detainees. Sedik told the BBC that a camp policewoman confirmed, after Sedik once secretly asked her, that sexual abuse is indeed happening in the camps.

"Yes, the rape has become a culture. It is gang rape and the Chinese police not only rape them but also electrocute them. They are subject to horrific torture," Sedik recalled the policewoman's words.

Gulzira Auelkhan, another Kazakh woman from Xinjiang who was forced to help the camp guards by stripping women, also confirmed to the BBC that gang rape is common in the camps.

"They forced me to take off those women's clothes and to restrain their hands and leave the room," Auelkhan said. "You can't tell anyone what happened ... It is designed

to destroy everyone's spirit."

In the recent past, several previously detained Uyghurs had also described similar harrowing tales of torture and rape from the Xinjiang camps.

Gulbakhar Jalilova, a Uyghur and Kazakhstan national who was detained in 2017 for 15 months in an all-female camp, told The Epoch Times that rape happened on a daily basis in the camps. "Young girls are taken out and raped all night long. If you keep resisting, they will inject you with something and kill you," Jalilova said.

In 2019, Sayragul Sauytbay of Kazakh descent, who was forced to teach the Chinese language in the camp, told Haaretz, an Israeli newspaper, that she once witnessed a female detainee being raped by policemen, "one after the other," in front of 200 inmates. The incident left Sauytbay traumatized.

"While they were raping her they checked to see how we were reacting," Sauytbay told Haaretz. "People who turned their head or closed their eyes, and those who looked angry or shocked, were taken away and we never saw them again. It was awful."

"I will never forget the feeling of helplessness, of not being able to help her. After that happened, it was hard for me to sleep at night."

**Female adherents of Falun Gong are routinely subjected to sexual abuse and rape for not renouncing their faith.**

## Sexual Abuse of Other Spiritual Believers

Apart from targeting Uyghur Muslims, the CCP also employs such horrendous torture methods on Falun Gong practitioners, Buddhists, and Christians.

Female adherents of Falun Gong are routinely subjected to sexual abuse and rape for not renouncing their faith. Falun Gong (or Falun Dafa) is a spiritual meditation discipline based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, tolerance; it is freely practiced by over 100 million people worldwide but is being violently persecuted in China, and has been since July 1999.

Detailing the torture and routine sexual abuse faced by Falun Gong practitioners, a two-part report has been compiled by Minghui.org, a U.S.-based website dedi-

cated to documenting the persecution of Falun Gong.

At the notorious Masanjia Forced Labor Camp in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, 18 female practitioners were thrown into the men's cells and the guards encouraged the inmates to rape the spiritual adherents, Minghui.org reported. The elderly or young, no one was exempted from these abuses.

In 2001, Zou Jin, 70, of Changsha City, Hunan Province, was gang-raped at the Changsha City First Detention Center and sentenced to nine years before she passed away. A 9-year-old girl, who was the orphan child of a Falun Gong practitioner, was gang-raped at the Changping Mental Hospital in Beijing in 2002. "Her screams and cries were heart-wrenching," the Minghui.org report said.

The report said the authorities also forced pregnant practitioners to abort their unborn babies, beating and shocking them with electric batons which eventually lead to miscarriage.

The CCP hasn't shown any leniency in abusing Buddhist nuns or Christians either. The Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy has reported on the personal account of an anonymous Tibetan monk who was detained for four months in a re-education center, in Sog County, Tibet Autonomous Region, in 2017. The monk recounted seeing nuns being sexually abused after participating in military drills.

"Many nuns would lose consciousness during the [military] drills," the monk wrote. "Sometimes officers would take unconscious nuns inside where I saw them ... grope all over their body."

"Who knows what else they did to the nuns?" the monk wrote.

Citing the sexual abuse account of a Chinese Christian, the editor-in-chief of the Bitter Winter magazine, Massimo Introvigne, wrote that Jiang Guizhi, a member of The Church of Almighty God in China, was raped by policemen and later died after the severe torture.

In 2019, the Association for the Defense of Human Rights and Religious Freedom (ADHRRF) reported a more detailed account of the torture experienced by Jiang. After being repeatedly asked by a cellmate, Jiang revealed that "the police had taken her to a private room in a hotel where she was interrogated, raped, and had objects stuffed inside her vagina," the ADHRRF reported.

Arshdeep Sarao contributed to this report.

## OPINION

# Mumbai's Electrical Blackout: Chinese Gray-Area Warfare?

AUSTIN BAY



Let's start with relevant facts. Mumbai is India's largest city (20 million residents), its major financial center (India's central bank is located there) and the capital of the state of Maharashtra, a financial powerhouse unto itself.

Those facts alone make Mumbai a target for any group seeking to weaken India, much less wage war on India. For example, damaging a financial hub exacts immediate and long-term economic costs.

That's why Pakistani-backed Islamic terrorists have launched several attacks on the city. In 2006, terrorists blew up packed commuter trains. In November 2008, an Islamic terrorist assault team attacked Mumbai and murdered 166 people.

Here are some newer facts only Big Lie propagandists would dispute, but there are a lot of those snakes around: At 10 a.m. on Oct. 12, Mumbai suffered a massive electrical power outage. Local trains stopped, stranding passengers. Cellphone service crashed. India's bond market was disrupted during peak trading hours. Some neighborhoods lost power for over 12 hours. Indian media called the outage Mumbai's "worst in decades." And it was.

In November, India Today reported that Maharashtra's cyber department believed a malware attack could have caused the crippling outage. "Could have" is speculation, not fact. However, technical experts found indications of attempted cyber intrusions on digital devices controlling Mumbai's grid.

On Feb. 28, The New York Times reported Recorded Future, a Massachusetts-based company that—get this anodyne description—"studies the use of the internet by state actors," had discovered Chinese malware "flowing into the control systems that manage electric supply across India" and elsewhere in the electrical production and transmission system.

Caveat: Because Recorded Future could not get inside India's complex power grid, its experts could not examine the malware's details.

A further qualification: On March 2, IndiaTimes.com reported that India's Union power minister, R.K. Singh, said there is no evidence a cyberattack caused Mumbai's blackout. The power ministry believed human error caused the outage, not cyberattacks by China or Pakistan.

New caveat: The ministry agreed there were attempted cyberattacks on India's northern and southern region electric



Mumbai during the first day of a nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in India on March 25, 2020.

control centers, but the malware did not reach the operating systems.

Additional caveat of confusion: On March 1, Maharashtra's home minister, Anil Deshmukh, claimed that the Mumbai power outage in October 2020 was a cyber-sabotage attempt.

**The ability to cause blackouts in an enemy country—and, make no mistake, communist China regards the United States as THE enemy country—is a gray-area warfare capability.**

Observation: In democratic nations, national and state governments/politicians frequently contradict one another because they really don't know. I offer Dr. Anthony Fauci as an example of a politician who contradicts himself.

Bottom-line fact: The Sino-Indian War of 1962 is still unresolved. In 2020, Indian and Chinese military forces repeatedly squared off in the Himalayas. During one 2020 military confrontation in the Galwan Valley, Maharashtra state authorities noticed an increase in Chinese attempts to penetrate its power grid.

Bottom-line fact: Chinese-sourced malware entered the Indian digital network associated with the electrical power grid.

Bottom-line intelligence assessment: Confirming presence doesn't confirm an attack that succeeded in gaining control of the power grid, but it does confirm direct threat to attack, direct capability to attack, and, in my opinion, the intent to attack.

I've framed this column not as an opinion essay but as an intelligence assessment moving toward an operational assessment. Why did I do this? American citizens need to understand the threats they and American allies face on a daily basis—from a vicious, advantage-seeking enemy.

The ability to cause blackouts in an enemy country—and, make no mistake, communist China regards the United States as THE enemy country—is a gray-area warfare capability. "Gray area" means the attacker conducts attacks that are designed to be uncertain and deniable.

The October Mumbai blackout perfectly fits the uncertain and deniable criteria.

A digital attack doesn't leave shell craters or humans dead—at least not in the same overt sense as a bomb raid. But the contingent lethality of a cyberattack is real; a sustained digital attack erodes morale and economic and defensive capabilities.

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

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## CHINESE INFLUENCE

# WHO Probe Under Scrutiny Over Investigators' Ties to Chinese Regime

FRANK FANG

International critics are questioning the impartiality of a World Health Organization (WHO) team that recently conducted a fact-finding mission in Wuhan—the origin of the CCP virus.

The team consisted of 17 Chinese experts and 17 foreign experts from 10 countries. They began their work in the central Chinese city of Wuhan—the epicenter of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) virus outbreak—in late January before presenting their preliminary findings at a virtual press conference on Feb. 9.

However, the composition of the WHO team has come under scrutiny. In particular, some experts have relationships with the Chinese regime, raising conflict of interest issues.

Leung Man-to, a political science professor at Taiwan's National Cheng Kung University, told The Epoch Times that the independence of the findings was compromised by the fact that foreign experts chosen by the WHO needed to first be approved by Beijing.

In October last year, Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO's Health Emergencies Program, said during a meeting that "a list of candidates has been submitted to the Chinese authorities for their consideration and for next steps in order to deploy that team."

Given the experts were vetted by Beijing, Leung said that it was unlikely their findings would stray from the CCP's narrative of the virus origins.

"Simply put, we can reasonably infer that the conclusions of the findings were long written up, and [Beijing] simply needed people [foreign experts] to lend their support," Leung said.

He added that the independence of the findings was further compromised by the fact that Chinese experts were part of the team.

The experts, who were in China for four weeks, two of which were spent in quarantine, were reliant on Chinese authorities to do the actual investigation, according to WHO adviser Jamie Metz. The Chinese regime also refused to provide raw data on early COVID-19 cases to the health body, according to one WHO team member.

The WHO has not yet released its final report on its findings in Wuhan. However, Peter Ben Embarek, who led the team, said on Feb. 9 that the possibility of the virus being leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology was "extremely unlikely." Days later, WHO Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus appeared to walk back on this statement, saying that "all hypotheses remain open and require further study."

## Ties to the CCP

At least two of the foreign experts on the team—Peter Daszak and Marion Koopmans—have ties to the Chinese regime. Koopmans is a Dutch virologist, while Daszak is a U.S.-UK dual national who heads EcoHealth Alliance, a New York-based nonprofit that works in pandemic prevention.

In September 2018, Daszak said that EcoHealth was a recipient of CCP money, while taking part in a conference sponsored by Chinese state broadcaster CGTN, the international arm of China's state broadcaster CCTV.

"Our organization has been working in China in collaboration with Chinese scientists in the government of China for over 15 years, supported by federal funding from the U.S. and federal funding from China," Daszak said.

EcoHealth also "channeled money from the [U.S.] National Institute of Health" to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, according to a January article by New York Magazine. The institute, one of China's top virus research labs, has been at the center of speculation that it could have been the source of the pandemic through an accidental lab leak. Researchers at the lab have conducted extensive research on bat coronaviruses.

A fact sheet released by the U.S. State Department in late January stated that it "had reason to believe" several researchers at the institute fell ill with symptoms consistent with both COVID-19 and common seasonal illnesses



WHO team members Peter Daszak (R) and Marion Koopmans (L) are accompanied by Peter Ben Embarek (C) as they leave their hotel in Wuhan, a city in central China's Hubei Province on Feb. 10, 2021.

in the autumn of 2019. A senior researcher at the institute previously said in July 2020 there was "zero infection" among lab staff and students.

The sheet also said the lab was engaging in secret animal experiments for the Chinese military since 2017. It was also conducting "gain-of-function" research on viruses—which involves creating artificial viruses with new or enhanced capabilities, according to the fact sheet.

Beijing has repeatedly refuted suggestions that the virus was leaked from the institute. On Jan. 18, China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chungying during a daily briefing accused the fact sheet as being "filled with conspiracy theory and lies."

Daszak took China's position on the lab leak theory early last year, at a time when the Wuhan lab was under intense scrutiny as being the source of the virus. In February 2020, Daszak was among a group of 27 public health scientists who issued a joint statement "strongly" condemning "conspiracy theories suggesting that COVID-19 does not have a natural origin." The group said the coronavirus "originated in wildlife" after analyzing its genomes.

The Lancet statement was organized by Daszak, and his spokesperson told the Wall Street Journal in January that it was prepared as "a showing of support" for Chinese scientists, who at the time were allegedly receiving death threats.

Last September, Daszak appeared in a CCTV documentary on China's fight against the pandemic. He praised China's early responses to the outbreak, saying it was "unprecedented and is incredibly efficient."

Prior to the pandemic, Daszak also praised China's flagship foreign policy project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). According to a 2018 article on the website of China's Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Daszak praised the regime's efforts to work with other countries under the BRI to fight emerging infectious diseases, saying it would "benefit the world."

Beijing rolled out BRI in 2013 in an effort to expand its global influence and build Beijing-centered trade networks by financing infrastructure projects throughout Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America.

Koopmans also has ties to the CCP as evidenced by her biography page on the provincial Center for Disease Control and Prevention in southern China's Guangdong Province. The bio page stated that she was hired in 2008 to work as the center's science adviser.

She also lauded Chinese regime's responses to the outbreak. According to a February 2020 article from the CCP's official mouthpiece People's Daily, the Dutch virologist praised Beijing for how quickly it was able to build a field hospital in Wuhan to treat patients.

Daszak and Koopmans did not respond to requests for comment.

## Concerns

Some in the U.S. health community have voiced concerns about the apparent conflicts of interest in the WHO team.

"Dr. Daszak has a clear-cut conflict of interest that should've disqualified him from participation on the WHO team," stated Michael Weinstein, president of the Los Angeles-based nonprofit AIDS Healthcare Foundation, according to a Feb. 10 statement.

He added: "Now, any conclusions of the investigation will be tainted by one more fragment of uncertainty."

"Regrettably, the only plausible way out of this situation is to start over—to disband the WHO team, and charge a neutral, non-political body with reconstituting it. To ensure the highest degree of independence, all members of the new team should have the full protection of diplomatic immunity."

Leung told The Epoch Times that had former U.S. President Donald Trump won his re-election bid, his administration would either reject the WHO findings outright, or be a more forceful critic of the body than the Biden administration.

On Feb. 9, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said the "jury is still out" on whether Beijing gave full transparency to the WHO team. Days later, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan issued a statement questioning the process by which the team reached their findings. He also called on the regime to release its data from the earliest days of the outbreak.

Daszak criticized the White House's skepticism of China's transparency during the WHO probe, saying in a Feb. 9 tweet that President Joe Biden "has to look tough on China." He added, "Please don't rely too much on US intel: increasingly disengaged under Trump & frankly wrong on many aspects."

Several former Trump officials have rebuked the WHO team and its findings. Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Feb. 9 told Fox that there was "significant evidence" that the virus originated from the Wuhan lab, despite the WHO's statements. A day later, former director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe criticized the WHO findings as "disingenuous."

On Feb. 21, Matt Pottinger, the former deputy national security adviser, told CBS that the WHO team was "deeply conflicted."

"It's made up of people who have benefited from public funding to work in the very lab where this thing may have actually originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology," Pottinger said.

He concluded: "[I]t's not a credible exercise that we've seen undertaken to get to the roots of where this thing originated."

## CHINESE INFLUENCE

# Trade Group Driving China's Belt and Road Initiative in Australia: Internal Documents

RITA LI

A pro-Beijing organization in Australia is a driving force behind a decade-long infiltration into Australia, including promoting China's controversial Belt and Road Initiative, internal documents reveal.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a transcontinental investment project aimed at expanding China's global influence through political, economic, or cultural cooperation, was first proposed by Chinese leader Xi Jinping in 2013. In recent years, the Australia International Trade Association (AITA) has organized more than 70 visiting tours for Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Australian officials.

As an Australian civil organization with close ties with the CCP's United Front Work and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, AITA has launched extensive local events focusing on promoting the Belt and Road Initiative.

## Forums to Promote BRI

Since the BRI officially began in 2015, AITA has held forums annually across Australia to promote the BRI, according to the CCP's foreign affairs documents obtained by The Epoch Times.

On Sept. 23, 2015, the "Australasia China Cities Summit & Business Forum" took place at Melbourne Town Hall. A member of the CCP's United Front organization, Wang Yanguo, gave a keynote speech on BRI policy.

Wang is the Executive Vice President of China International Chamber of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC).

ACFIC is run by the United Front Work Department and encourages businessmen to invest in China and further integrate into the United Front, according to a report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

In the same year, AITA hosted another three sub-forums in New South Wales, Tasmania, and North Island, New Zealand.

From 2017 to 2019, AITA depicted the nature of the forum more straightforwardly.

In 2017, part of the original forum title was replaced by "Belt and Road Urban Development and Sister Cities Forum," according to the official introduction. In 2018 and 2019, forums were defined as "Belt and Road in Australia."

The BRI has come under scrutiny in Australia over the years and the 2020 forum was downgraded to a "Belt and Road" event hosted in Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne.

Australian Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton said the BRI was a "propaganda exercise from China" during an interview with 2GB radio on May 21, 2020.



Protesters against China's Belt and Road Initiative gather in front of Victoria's Parliament House in Melbourne, Australia, on June 7, 2020

AITA didn't respond immediately to a request by The Epoch Times for comment on its promotion of the BRI and its relationship with the United Front Work Department.

## Intermediary Behind China-Australia Partnership

The Epoch Times published exclusive reports last year revealing the head of AITA, Michael Guo, had been working on mutual communications between China and Australia.

As an Australian civil organization with close ties with the CCP's United Front Work and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, AITA has launched extensive local events focusing on promoting the Belt and Road Initiative.

Guo immigrated to Australia from Beijing in the 1980s, and was tailored specifically to work for the different programs under BRI, given titles such as

"the secretary of the Belt and Road Education Alliance" and "the secretary of the Belt and Road China-Australia Logistics Supply Chain e-commerce Alliance."

According to the AITA brochure, Guo has "actively contributed to nearly 60 pairs of friendship cities, among over 100 in total, between China and Australia."

For the past six years, Guo has arranged for or accompanied Chinese and Australian officials to travel overseas, ranging from a few to more than a dozen times per year.

## Australian PM to Call Off BRI, Cast Doubt on its Benefits

BRI's lack of transparency and history of leaving borrowing emerging countries such as Sri Lanka in a "debt trap," have constantly been questioned. The multi-billion-dollar deal is facing another setback in Australia.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison recently said he may rip up the agreement signed by the state government of Victoria, the Herald Sun reported on Feb. 15.

Victoria is one of the six states in Australia, with Melbourne as its capital. The Prime Minister said he saw no benefit to Victoria's deal with Beijing.

"If there are benefits, what are they and what was paid for them? I don't have the answers to those questions at this point, but the assessment of those arrangements will continue," Morrison said.

The statement is not the only push-back of Beijing's retaliatory barley probe against Australia.

In May 2020, the CCP imposed high tariffs on Australian barley, the second-largest crop in Victoria, followed by suspending imports of Victorian logs in November 2020.

Early on June 11, 2020, Morrison urged the Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, to abandon the deal which was "inconsistent with the Australian government's policy," speaking with 3AW's Neil Mitchell.

On the other hand, the BRI did not prevent Beijing's economic retaliation from spilling over to Victoria, since Morrison's calling for an investigation into the origins and handling of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) virus, commonly known as the novel coronavirus.

Under the new Foreign Relations Bill—passed on Dec. 3, 2020—state governments have until March 10 to inform the Federal government of all deals with foreign powers.

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## ENVIRONMENT

# Chinese Regime Controls ASEAN Countries Via Mekong River's 'Water Faucet,' Expert Says

KATE JIANG &amp; JENNIFER ZENG

The Chinese regime is using the Mekong River, the most important water system in Southeast Asia, to control half of the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), an expert said.

The Mekong River originates on China's Tibetan Plateau and flows through six countries. In early 2021, it once again experienced a serious drop in water levels, causing widespread international concerns. The Mekong River Commission, an international organization, issued a statement on Feb. 12, saying that the Mekong River water levels have fallen to "worrying levels."

In fact, for more than a decade since 2010, water crises have often erupted on the Mekong River.

A Chinese hydrologist tells The Epoch Times that one of the reasons behind this is that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has taken control of the "water tap" of the Mekong, and that the Mekong River has become a political bargaining chip for the CCP to use in controlling half of the 10 countries of ASEAN.

During a recent exclusive interview with The Epoch Times, German-based hydrology expert Wang Weiluo said that ever since 2010, the Mekong River has been experiencing frequent water crises. But for the CCP, the Mekong River is no longer simply an issue of water resource utilization, but more of political and diplomatic leverage.

With the control of the Mekong's "water faucet," the CCP has gained the political leverage to control half of the ASEAN countries. The hegemonic behavior of the CCP in the Mekong River Basin has also drawn the attention of the United States and Japan, making the Mekong River a new geopolitical hotspot.

According to Wang, using the Mekong River as a political bargaining chip is harmful to both other countries and the CCP itself. The large and small dams built on the Lancang River, the upper reach of the Mekong River inside China, not only pose a direct threat to the 70 million people whose livelihoods depend on the Mekong River, but also to the Chinese people in the Lancang River basin. The CCP's predatory water development has also resulted in a waste of resources.

## From Water Abundance to Water Crises

The upper reach of the Mekong River is the Lancang River inside China. It originates in the Tanggula Mountains on China's Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. As the world's 10th, and Asia's sixth-longest river, the Mekong flows through six countries including China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, before eventually flowing into the South China Sea.

The lower reaches of the river and the upper reaches of the river are collectively known as the Lancang-Mekong River, which has a main section of more than 4,000 kilometers (2,485 miles). It is the longest river in Southeast Asia, and is known as the "Danube of Asia."

According to Voice of America, about 70 million people are directly dependent on the Mekong River for their livelihoods.

"Both the Lancang and Mekong rivers are originally very rich in hydropower resources," Wang said. "They come directly from the Tibetan Plateau to the south, and the slope of the upper reaches is very steep. In the southern part of the lower reaches, due to the influence of the monsoon, the relatively abundant rainfall during the rainy season also makes the rivers more water-rich. The Mekong River has a distinct dry and rainy season, with the dry season generally lasting from November to April and the rainy season from May to October."

However, this river, which was originally rich in water resources, has been experiencing frequent water resource crises since 2010.

According to an Eyes on Earth report: Monitoring the Quantity of Water Flowing Through the Upper Mekong Basin Under Natural (Unimpeded) Conditions, in 2010, when the first water crisis broke

out on the Mekong River, the Xiaowan Hydropower Station on the Lancang River was completed and the power generation unit was already in operation.

By simulating the flow of the Mekong River from 1992 to 2019, and comparing the data before and after the dams were built, Eyes on Earth points out that the construction of upstream dams by the CCP has affected the volume of water in the Mekong River.

According to the report, "Considerable differences in measured and predicted flow occurred in 2010, when the major Xiaowan dam was completed and the generators came online."

The report says, "As noted earlier, this reservoir [Xiaowan] can hold about seven times the amount of water as the previous three reservoirs combined, therefore its ability to regulate and restrict flow rises to another order of magnitude. The capacity to restrict flow is clearly demonstrated in the relationship between predicted natural flow and measured flow, since a large quantity of water is 'missing' at the gauge during the warm season, when river flow normally would greatly increase, due to melting snow and recent precipitation on the Tibetan plateau."

## Number Games to Shift Responsibilities

In 2010, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia sent delegates to the CCP to discuss the serious drop in water levels in the Mekong River, arguing that CCP's dams on the river were causing the drought downstream.

Qin Gang, the CCP's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman at the time, denied the claim. Qin Gang claimed that the annual flow of the Lancang River was only 13.5 percent of the Mekong's flow to the sea, and with such a small percentage, it could not affect the overall situation.

The CCP's political counsellor Chen Dehai also said that the three reservoirs built along the Lancang River, namely Manwan, Dachaoshan, and Jinghong, were all very small, and their impact was not significant.

But Wang says that these are just number games the CCP played to dodge responsibilities. Much of the data on China's rivers are kept secret. Even the disclosed data are often contradictory.

Wang said, for example, the average annual outflow of the Lancang River at China's border is about 64 billion cubic meters, but there is another estimate that puts it at 76 billion cubic meters, a difference of 12 billion cubic meters of water.

If one takes 76 billion cubic meters as the true number, the annual flow of the Lancang River would be 16 percent of the Mekong's flow to the sea, and there would be a difference of 2.5 percent compared with the 13.5 percent claimed by Qin Gang.

According to Wang, the CCP once also claimed that China has 18.6 percent of the water rights of the Lancang-Mekong River, meaning that 18.6 percent of the water resources belong to China.

So the point is, the CCP's numbers about Lancang-Mekong River keep changing, from 13.5 percent to 16 percent, and then to 18.6 percent.

When discussing rights, the CCP chose 18.6 percent, but when it comes to accountability, it chose 13.5 percent.

Wang said, even if the real number is 13.5 percent, it does not mean that the CCP does not have to bear any responsibilities.

Qin Hui, a professor at Tsinghua University in China, said in an article that the 13.5 percent is the result of dividing the average annual runoff at the exit of the Lancang River by the average annual runoff at the mouth of the Mekong River.

However, in most of the river sections inside China, such as at the Luang Prabang section, the outbound flow from China accounts for about two-thirds of the total water amount of Mekong.

Wang also explained, "The figure 13.5 percent is meaningless, as you are measuring the amount of water at Sai Kung, the mouth of Mekong to the South China Sea, so it is 13.5 percent. But the right way to measure it is to look at the section of

the river near China, that is, the section right after the Lancang River flows out of China. That is, if you check the river section that is just out of China, and within 300 kilometers from the Chinese border, you will find that 2/3 of the water comes from the upper reaches of China. If you stop the water inside China, the people downstream will scream that they don't have any water coming down."

A report jointly issued by the Ministry of Water Resources and the Mekong River Commission also confirms this viewpoint. According to this report, during the Mekong's dry season, the outflow from the Jinghuang dam in China reached 41 percent of the flow of the main stem of the Lancang-Mekong River between 2010 and 2015.

When analyzing the impact of the dams on the Mekong River, the report says, "Using monthly average discharge of 1960-2009 and 2010-2015, average volume for the dry season (Dec. to May) was evaluated at Jinghong and seven other hydrological stations along the Mekong River. The results show that the operation of the Lancang cascade dams increased dry season volume at Jinghong from 11.82 billion m<sup>3</sup> (or 21 percent of annual volume of 1960-2009) to 17.77 billion m<sup>3</sup> (or 41 percent of annual volume of 2010-2015), contributing 5.95 billion m<sup>3</sup> (or 20 percent)."

Qin Hui also criticized the Chinese officials for saying that there are only "three reservoirs" on the Lancang River, namely Manwan, Dachaoshan, and Jinghong, while not mentioning the Xiaowan Reservoir, which has a capacity of more than 15 billion cubic meters.

The Xiaowan Hydropower Station started to generate electricity in September 2009. The capacity of Xiaowan Reservoir is almost five times the combined capacity of Manwan, Dachaoshan, and Jinghong, which has a significant impact on the downstream flow.

Qin Hui questioned, "How come it became 'almost having no impact' in the mouth of officials?"

According to the report by Eyes on Earth, in addition to the Xiaowan Reservoir, the CCP has built the larger Nuozadu Reservoir on the Lancang River, with a capacity of 27.49 billion cubic meters. Its first generator was commissioned in 2012, and the impact on the downstream exceeds that of the Xiaowan Reservoir.

## A Helping Hand or Political Bargaining Chip?

While the CCP chose to ignore the drought in the Mekong River Basin in 2010, it went out of its way to offer help six years later.

In 2016, Vietnam, known for its rice and fishery products, experienced a severe drought, with some coastal areas encroached by seawater due to a reduction in river water.

According to Chinese state media outlet Xinhua, the CCP extended a helping hand to the lower Mekong countries. Lu Kang, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman at the time, said at a press conference that China would provide emergency water supply to the lower Mekong River from March 15, 2016, to April 10, 2016, through China's Yunnan Jinghuang Power Station in Yunnan Province.

In October of the same year, the report issued jointly by Mekong River Commission and Ministry of Water Resources of China stated that the release of water from the cascade dams built by the CCP in the upper reaches of the Mekong River helped raise the water level during the Mekong's dry season.

The report says, "The operation of the Lancang cascade dams increased dry season volume at Jinghong from 11.82 billion m<sup>3</sup> (or 21 percent of annual volume of 1960-2009) to 17.77 billion m<sup>3</sup> (or 41 percent of annual volume of 2010-2015), contributing 5.95 billion m<sup>3</sup> (or 20 percent)."

Wang told The Epoch Times that in 2016, during the CCP's "disaster relief" period, the CCP released at least 1,000 cubic meters per second of water into the lower reaches of the Mekong River every day, and the maximum release was more than 2,000 cubic meters per second,



The Mekong river bordering Thailand and Laos from the Thai side in Nong Khai, Thailand, on Oct. 29, 2019.

while the natural flow of the Lancang River was around 400 cubic meters per second at that time.

This means that the scale of China's water release exceeded the flow of the Lancang River during the dry season, and was five times the natural flow of the lower reaches.

This also means that China has taken control of the "water tap" of the Mekong River.

Wang said it is worth noting that the Chinese water transfer to the lower Mekong River was made by the Chinese Flood Control and Drought Relief Command, which means that the CCP used the "disaster relief" fund to do it. It was Chinese taxpayers' money, and it was the Chinese people who paid the bills for the CCP.

Wang said the reason why the CCP chose to lend a helping hand in 2016 was out of political considerations.

In 2014, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang proposed the establishment of the Lancang-Mekong Summit at the China-ASEAN Leaders' Meeting.

Two years later, in March 2016, the first Lancang-Mekong Summit was held in Sanya city, Hainan Province, in China. Leaders from 5 countries of the Lancang-Mekong River region attended the summit. Xinhua reported the summit in a very high-profile manner and the CCP took the opportunity to show friendship by releasing water downstream.

In his speech at the meeting, Li Keqiang mentioned that it was necessary to build a "Community of Shared Future" among Lancang-Mekong countries, and that "China has signed or is negotiating with several Mekong countries the initiatives to build 'One Belt, One Road' projects."

Wang said that showing some good gestures was a political need for the CCP at that time. The "disaster relief" effort could also pave the way for the CCP to invest in Southeast Asian countries.

According to Chinese media China Times, accompanying the first-ever Lancang-Mekong summit in 2016 were a list of 78 projects, a special fund for Lancang-Mekong cooperation, a 10 billion RMB (\$1.55 billion) loan, and a \$10 billion credit line, all provided by the CCP.

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## What Can the CCP Gain From Mekong Countries?

The Mekong Basin countries are relatively backward economically, but rich in natural resources. By investing in the Mekong River Basin, the CCP can not only expand international trade and export excess domestic capacity through the Belt and Road projects, but can also gain access to the rich natural resources of the Mekong River Basin countries.

Take Laos as an example. According to the Guide to Foreign Investment Cooperation by Country issued by the Ministry of Commerce of China, Laos is rich in

deposits of gold, copper, tin, lead, potassium, iron, gypsum, coal, and salt.

In the meantime, it is also rich in hydropower and forestry resources. Laos has about 17 million hectares of forests, with a national forest cover rate of about 50 percent.

It produces valuable timber such as teak, sourwood, and rosewood. China imports copper, timber, and agricultural products from Laos.

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According to China's Ministry of Commerce, Cambodia, another country in the Mekong River Basin, is also rich in forestry, minerals, and fishery resources, including high-quality woods such as teak, ironwood, rosewood, and ebony, as well as many kinds of bamboo.

Cambodia's mineral deposits include oil, natural gas, phosphate, gemstones, gold, iron, bauxite, etc.

Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia is the largest natural freshwater lake in Southeast Asia and is known as a "Fish Lake."

According to Investgo.cn, in 2019, the trade volume between China and Cambodia reached \$9.43 billion, up 27.7 percent year-on-year.

And in the same year, Chinese enterprises signed \$5.58 billion in new construction contracts in Cambodia, up 93.6 percent year-on-year.

According to Wu Fu-cheng, deputy director of the National Economic Development Strategy Center at the Taiwan Institute for Economic Research, the CCP has a strong geopolitical strategic purpose in the Mekong region. Its investment aims at building a strategic partnership with ASEAN and deepening the relationships between China and ASEAN.

Wang told The Epoch Times that by investing in the Mekong River Basin, the CCP can also expand its shipping routes. It could gain the opportunity to create an alternative shipping route to the Strait of Malacca, which is to open up an alternative route to the South China Sea through the Mekong River. This route could help the CCP to import energy such as oil, and to reduce the control that the US and Japan have over the shipping routes.

## What Kind of Harm Has the CCP Brought to the Lancang-Mekong River?

Wang said by turning the dams into a political bargaining chip, the CCP has done a lot of harm to the people of the Lancang-Mekong River Basin. Not only do they suffer from frequent droughts, but their fishing industries have also suffered a significant impact.

Wang said after the reservoirs were

built, the sediment, which contains nutrients for fish, could not settle down.

Moreover, the temperature of the water inside the reservoir is several degrees lower than that of the normal river water. The lower temperature disrupts fish breeding. Fishermen have been complaining that their harvest has been decreasing, and they worry that they will lose their basis of survival in the near future.

While people outside China are suffering, people inside China are not benefiting from the dams either.

According to Wang, the height of the dams on the Lancang River is very high, most of them are over 100 meters, and the highest one reaches 294.5 meters. So after the construction of the reservoirs, local farmers had to move up to the mountains, where the land is very poor and not suitable for farming.

Secondly, the local farmers' irrigation water was restricted because the water in the Nuozadu and Xiaowan reservoirs was restrained by the hydropower stations.

Third, the subsidies provided by the CCP to the reservoir migrants actually came from the Chinese taxpayers, not from the money earned from the hydropower stations.

Wang also pointed out a problem that is often overlooked: the flooding of the Lancang River is relatively large, with a maximum measured flow peak of 12,800 cubic meters per second.

In the meantime, the Xiaowan Reservoir has a flood discharge capacity of 20,000 cubic meters per second.

If any problem occurs, for example, if the Xiaowan Dam breaks, or if the CCP chooses to release the water in the reservoir to reduce the pressure on the dam, people downstream, including those at the Mekong River basin, will be greatly threatened.

While the hydropower stations have brought a lot of damage and threat, some of the electricity generated goes to waste and is not used.

According to the Bureau of Statistics in Yunnan Province, due to overcapacity, 31.4 billion kilowatt-hours of hydropower were wasted in Yunnan Province in 2016, and hydropower stations on the Lancang River were facing the same problem.

To reduce the waste, the CCP had to invest in transmission lines to send electricity from Yunnan to places with higher demand, such as Guangdong Province. The investment in these hydropower stations and transmission lines seemed to be of no benefit other than to help the CCP to generate more GDP.

## Mekong River: A New Geopolitical Hotspot

In recent years, the international community has become increasingly aware of the threat posed by the CCP to South-

east Asian countries, and the United States and Japan have taken corresponding actions. The Mekong River has become a new geopolitical hotspot.

On Feb. 26, 2021, the government of Japan granted \$2.9 million to the Mekong River Commission to implement its new strategic plan, seeking to promote responsible development in the region.

Prior to that, in September 2020, the U.S. announced the launch of the Mekong-U.S. Partnership to promote stability, peace, and sustainable development in the Mekong Basin.

The U.S. statement says, "Our relationship with Mekong partner countries is an integral part of our Indo-Pacific vision and our strategic partnership with ASEAN."

According to the BBC, Stimson Center co-director Yun Sun said the catalyst for the United States to launch the program was China's previous refusal to share hydrological information, as the data would reveal how the CCP operates the dams on the Lancang River.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo wrote on Twitter on Aug. 14, 2020, that "The U.S. supports the Mekong River Commission's call for transparency in dam operations on the Mekong River. The People's Republic of China's massive dams are manipulating flows in a non-transparent manner that harms Mekong countries."

On Dec. 15, 2020, the U.S. Department of State launched the Mekong Dam Monitor in collaboration with the Stimson Center and Eyes on Earth, and has been releasing near-real-time data of dam levels on the Mekong River obtained via satellite monitoring.

One of the key reasons why the Mekong River has become a political bargaining chip for the CCP is the lack of information transparency. Although the CCP claimed in 2020 that it would share hydrological information on the Lancang River, it has not done so.

According to the Mekong River Commission, the Mekong's water level dropped significantly on Dec. 31, 2020, but the CCP did not notify downstream countries until five days later, on Jan. 5, 2021.

Wang said, "The normal international practice for transnational rivers is that the river basin countries basically follow three principles: first, to make fair and reasonable use of the water resources of the transnational rivers; second, not to cause significant damage to other countries; and third, to notify other countries in advance of any construction work on the rivers, and only after obtaining their consent can the work begin."

Unfortunately, he said, the CCP doesn't follow international norms, and it has become accustomed to not only keeping everything in the dark, but also doing everything in the dark.



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