

WEEK 17, 2022

THE EPOCH TIMES

# CHINA INSIDER

## WITNESSING A HISTORIC APPEAL FOR FREEDOM

**FALUN GONG  
ADHERENTS  
REMEMBER  
A PEACEFUL  
PROTEST  
23 YEARS AGO**

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

# Bearing Witness to Historic Appeal, Campaign of Terror in Communist China

EVA FU

NEW YORK—Fears of police harassment and arrests have plagued 23-year-old Zhang Minghui since she was a year old. That’s when Chinese police officers beat her father with wooden planks until his feet swelled and turned a dark purple color, and burned his arm with a lighter.

Before she was even 2, police locked her and her grandfather in an unofficial detention facility for a week. Provided with no food or water, they lived on whatever morsels could be stealthily brought to them by kind-hearted friends of her grandfather.

The detention in that dark room with only two small windows made up part of the fragmented memories of her childhood. When she was little, she had wondered whether it was all a bad dream.

If only it had been. Three months after she fled China for the United States in 2019, police again arrested her father and later sentenced him to four years in prison. Zhang’s 11-member family, like millions of Chinese households, was targeted by authorities solely for being adherents of the spiritual practice Falun Gong, and striving to live by its three principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance.

Zhang was among 2,000 Falun Gong practitioners who participated in a parade in New York City’s Flushing neighborhood on April 23 marking 23 years since a historic appeal by adherents in Beijing on April 25, 1999.

The appeal was the largest peaceful protest in modern China after the 1989 student protests in Tiananmen Square. And like the 1989 protests, it would precede a ferocious clampdown at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party, a regime that brooks no dissent.

## Hostility

Falun Gong was wildly popular in China in the 1990s. By word of mouth, it drew a following of 70 million to 100 million over its health benefits and moral teachings. Zhang’s parents had met at a Falun Gong event during this period, and later married. Chinese officials for years openly celebrated the practice’s health benefits.

Those were years that Zhang never had a chance to experience, before the atheist regime made an abrupt U-turn.

In April 1999, in its first act of open hostility toward the faith group, officials in the northern Chinese city of Tianjin deployed police to beat and arrest dozens of adherents.

The city’s authorities told the adherents they had to petition regime officials in Beijing to get the detainees released. As word spread, more than 10,000 practitioners from around the country eventually made their way to Beijing.

While Zhang was an infant at the time, others at remembrance events in Flushing and elsewhere were old enough to remember the appeal, with some having



We admire their courage and commitment in the face of such oppression.

Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.), about Falun Gong adherents in China



Zhang Minghui and her mother while her father was in detention, in Shandong Province, China, in 2000.

participated it. Fan Minghua, a 62-year-old living in Virginia, was one of them.

## Standing Up for What’s Right

In 1999, Fan was a merchant from Tianjin in her late 30s. Her participation in the April 25 appeal would have shocked the cutthroat businesswoman she was just a few years earlier.

In her hometown of Yangcun township, Fan was once known to be a “smart” person. She had sold everything from clothing to fish to coal, and made money off conning her neighbors. She lied about the length of the pants she sold, manipulated the scale to make her products appear heavier, and diluted sesame oil, a staple in Chinese cooking, with cheaper vegetable oil to profit from the difference.

“I thought nothing about morals at the time. Money was king,” Fan, who participated in a similar remembrance event in Washington on April 23, told The Epoch Times.

Reading the books of Falun Gong in 1997, she said, brought about a “night and day shift” in her mindset. She stopped all her unscrupulous schemes after learning what it meant to be truly a good person. Sometimes, she gave away her products for free to customers who were struggling financially.

Standing on Fuyou Street near the Zhongnanhai compound—the Chinese Communist Party’s headquarters in Beijing—Fan felt immensely proud of herself for being able to stand up for the values she believed in.

## A Peaceful Appeal

On the tree-lined street, adherents quietly formed rows stretching for more than a mile, some doing the practice’s meditative exercises or reading Falun Gong books they brought. Others, like Fan, picked up plastic bottles and other trash from the ground. Many recalled seeing cars slowly passing through the street, with people inside filming the appeal.

Fan recalled practitioners standing on the sidewalk and leaving ample room for pedestrians to pass by. The quietness of Falun Gong practitioners formed a stark contrast to the blaring police cars on the street. According to Fan, not a single practitioner made noise or behaved in a disorderly fashion.

“It was magnificent,” she said.

By evening, all those who came for the appeal had left after learning that the detained Tianjin practitioners had regained their freedom and were assured of their right to practice freely without fear.

## State Terror

Beijing’s assurances to the appealing practitioners turned out to be the calm preceding a storm.

Fan, who was a volunteer organizer at a Falun Gong exercise site in her area, found herself a key target of the persecu-



COURTESY OF MINGHUI.ORG

(Above) Falun Gong practitioners participate in a parade in Queens, N.Y., to commemorate the 23rd anniversary of the April 25, 1999, peaceful appeal in Beijing, on April 23, 2022.

(Left) Falun Gong practitioners gather around Zhongnanhai to peacefully appeal for fair treatment, on April 25, 1999.



SAMIRA BOUADI/THE EPOCH TIMES

tion from the outset.

In the wee hours of July 20, police scaled the wall around her house and arrested her. At a detention center, police forced her to watch propaganda videos and sign a document renouncing her faith.

Decades earlier, Fan had been shaken by a home-ransacking experience when she was still a child during the tumultuous Cultural Revolution, when the communist Red Guards—young zealots who violently enforced the radical doctrines of communist leader Mao Zedong—confiscated her family’s valuables, including the door. Traumatized by such experiences of state-sponsored terror, Fan ended up caving in to the police.

She will never forget the moment she was coerced to renounce her faith, she said. “It felt like my entire body became paralyzed.”

## One Family’s Toll

It was under such an atmosphere that Zhang grew up.

Ten of the 11 members of Zhang’s family practice Falun Gong; they have lost count

of the arrests, house raids, and incidents of police harassment they’ve suffered over the past two decades.

The very day the persecution campaign was unleashed, Zhang’s grandmother Wang Zhen was taken away by police in a van in Weifang, in the central part of China’s Shandong Province, and detained for roughly two weeks.

The same day, Zhang’s father was in Beijing, making an appeal for Falun Gong. He was subjected to a brutal beating at the hands of police officers, who punched, kicked, and used wooden clubs and planks to assault him. The beatings left him bloodied, with blisters on his head and bruises all over his body, according to a 2017 account submitted by his wife to Minghui, a U.S.-based clearinghouse that collects first-hand information on the persecution from China.

During their family reunion for the 2000 Chinese New Year, Zhang’s parents and grandparents were subjected to another round of arrests, one of many that would occur over the following two decades. As a result, Zhang was largely in her aunt’s care.

That month of grueling torture caused Zhang’s father to lose half of his weight—from more than 200 pounds to about 100. He was sentenced to three years in prison shortly after. Both of Zhang’s grandmothers also received sentences of three years in prison.

The long-running persecution reduced the Zhangs from a well-to-do family to one struggling to get by. Each time the police visited, they took away all the cash and assets they could, including two vehicles with a collective value of 50,000 yuan (\$7,622), about four times the dispensable annual income for Shandong residents at the time.

Zhang, before coming to the United States, had hoped to reunite with her family here and begin a college degree in fine arts; however, the arrest and jailing of her father in 2019 got in the way.

“We have no desire to live an extravagant life, but even to live a most basic life is now difficult,” she told The Epoch Times.

Terri Wu contributed to this report.



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Zhang Minghui in New York on April 26, 2022.





# Wuhan Lab Allowed to Destroy ‘Secret Files’ Under Partnership With US National Lab, Agreement Shows

EVA FU

The Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in China has the right to make a partnering U.S. lab wipe all data arising from their collaborative work, a legal document reveals.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between the Wuhan lab and the Galveston National Laboratory at the University of Texas Medical Branch makes it obligatory for each of the two labs to delete “secret files” or materials upon the request of the other party.

“The party is entitled to ask the other to destroy and/or return the secret files, materials, and equipment without any backups,” states the MOU obtained by U.S. Right to Know, a nonprofit investigative research group focused on public health, through a Freedom of Information Act request.

The MOU focuses on promoting research and training cooperation between the two labs. It was signed in 2017 and stays in effect through this October. But the confidentiality terms would remain binding even after the agreement’s five-year duration expires, the agreement states.

The document broadly defines what materials are to be treated as “confidential,” opening the door to potentially all documents and data from any collaboration being subject to a deletion request.

“All cooperation and exchange documents, details and materials shall be treated as confidential info by the parties,” the MOU states.

The WIV has been at the center of growing speculation that the virus that causes COVID-19, which has now killed millions worldwide, may have leaked from the facility. The lab has denied the assertions, but Beijing has blocked international investigators’ access to data and records from the facility, thus preventing any meaningful review of the theory.

WIV and the Galveston National Laboratory formally declared their partnership the following year to “streamline future scientific and operational collaborations on dangerous pathogens,” according to a joint announcement in the journal Science.

Experts said the MOU terms about data removal are alarming and can potentially constitute a breach of law.

“The clause is quite frankly explosive,” Reuben Guttman, a partner at Guttman, Buschner & Brooks PLLC who focuses on ensuring the integrity of government programs, told Right to Know. “Anytime I see a public entity, I would be very concerned about destroying records.

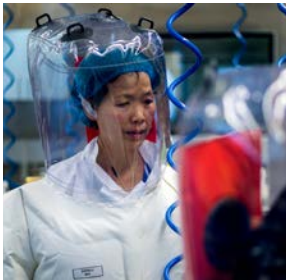
“You can’t just willy nilly say, ‘Well, you know, the Chinese can tell us when to destroy a document.’ It doesn’t work like that. There has to be a whole protocol.”

Christopher Smith, a spokesperson for the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB), told Right to Know that the lab was “built by the National Institutes of Health to help combat global health threats.”

“As a government-funded entity, UTMB is required to comply with applicable public information law obligations, including the preservation of all documentation of its research and findings.”



The P4 laboratory at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, on April 17, 2020.



Chinese virologist Shi Zhengli inside the P4 laboratory in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, on Feb. 23, 2017.

Representatives of UTMB and the Galveston lab didn’t respond by press time to a request by The Epoch Times for comment.

**Under Scrutiny**

The Galveston National Laboratory is one of two university-based, maximum-containment (BSL-4) laboratories in the United States focused on the study of highly infectious diseases and the development of medical countermeasures. It began collaborating with the WIV in 2013, a cooperation that entails training WIV scientists and conducting joint research programs. The then-Galveston lab Director James LeDuc, who retired last year, made multiple trips over the years to WIV.

The Galveston lab was also among the first in the world to receive samples of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly three weeks after LeDuc urged his Chinese counterparts to share the material.

The revelations contained in the 2017 MOU appear to contradict claims from WIV scientists that they would never scrub critical research information.

Chinese virologist Shi Zhengli, who heads the Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases at the WIV, had characterized allegations that her lab would delete such data as “baseless and appalling.”

“Even if we gave them all the records, they would still say we have hidden something or we have destroyed the evidence,” she said in a February interview with MIT Technology Review.

In September 2019, months before several of its researchers allegedly fell ill with COVID-like symptoms, the facility took its main database of virus samples offline.

The Wuhan lab’s safety standards have also attracted scrutiny since the pandemic originated in the city. Footage from 2017 showed that some researchers from the facility were feeding a bat while wearing only surgical gloves, and at least one researcher wore only a pair of regular glasses and a surgical mask when out collecting bat samples.

In April 2020, the Department of Education opened a probe of Galveston National Laboratory’s ties with the Wuhan lab. The Epoch Times has contacted the department for comment.

That same month, LeDuc had asked Shi to review a draft briefing he prepared for the university and the congressional staff investigating the issue.

“Please review carefully and make any changes that you would like. I want this to be as accurate as possible and I certainly do not want to misrepresent any of your valuable contributions,” he wrote in an email to Shi, which Right to Know obtained. A day earlier, Shi declined to talk with LeDuc over the phone “due to the complicated situation,” but insisted that the virus “is not a leaky [sic] from our lab or any other labs.”

Smith, UTMB’s director of media relations, had told the investigative group that “the information Dr. LeDuc wanted Dr. Shi to review was a description of her research on coronaviruses as he understood it.”

In correspondence with others, LeDuc nonetheless acknowledged that he considered a lab accident a possible source of the pandemic.

“It is certainly possible that a lab accident was the source of the epidemic and I also agree that we can’t trust the Chinese government,” he wrote on April 10, 2020, according to another email obtained by the group.



An aerial view of a residential area during the second stage of a pandemic lockdown in Jing'an district in Shanghai on April 5, 2022.

## ANALYSIS

# China’s Economic Suicide: ‘Zero-COVID’

ANTONIO GRACEFFO



Chinese leader Xi Jinping has been adamant that he will maintain his “zero-COVID” policy even as it destroys China’s economy.

By the first week of April, approximately 75 percent of China’s 100 largest cities, which account for over half of gross domestic product, have imposed COVID-19 restrictions. Shanghai’s draconian lockdown was the most widely publicized. Jilin, a major agricultural and commercial center, also was subjected to harsh restrictions. In March, the manufacturing city of Shenzhen saw a suspension of nearly all economic activity for a week.

With school closures and travel restrictions being implemented in Guangdong, home to tens of millions of people, another lockdown with dire implications for international trade may be on the horizon.

Going into 2022, the central government had already set the lowest GDP growth target in decades, which was 5.5 percent. But now, the Ukraine war and the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) adherence to a “zero-COVID” policy are slowing the economy even further.

The Caixin/Markit services purchasing managers’ index (PMI), a measure of general economic activity, dropped to 42 in March from 50.2 in February. A Caixin index of less than 50 means that the economy is contracting.

To put the economic damage of the Shanghai lockdown into perspective, this financial hub generates 3.8 percent of the country’s GDP and 10.4 percent of its trade. More than 800 hundred multinational firms have regional or country headquarters in Shanghai, and 70,000 foreign-owned businesses are located there.

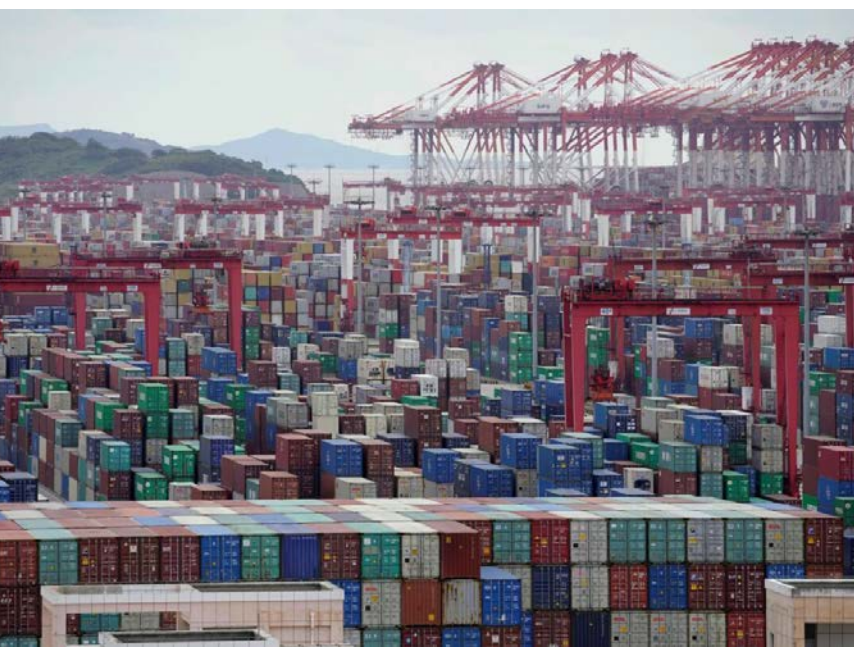
Shanghai’s seaport is the largest in the world, with a volume four times that of the Port of Los Angeles; it accounts for 16.7 percent of China’s shipping.

As a result of COVID measures, export container costs in Shanghai are five times higher and air freight rates are double what they were before the pandemic. Lockdowns are also causing port congestion.

As of April 11, the number of container ships waiting off the coast of Shanghai had increased by 15 percent since March. A shortage of port workers is delaying the processing of documents necessary for unloading, and trucks are unable to transport goods to the processing mills. Consequently, port usage has seen its first contraction since 2020.

Across the country, restrictions on truckers—such as mass testing and the need to show negative COVID results at multiple checkpoints—are causing logjams, shortages, and production stoppages.

During the first week of April, freight traffic in China dropped by about 25



Containers are seen at the Yangshan Deep-Water Port in Shanghai on Oct. 19, 2020.

percent. The number of passenger trains is down to 30 percent. Flight ticket prices have also declined steeply as fewer people are able to travel. The International Energy Agency (IEA) had expected to see China’s jet fuel consumption grow by 10,000 barrels per day; however, jet fuel demand is expected to fall by 3.5 percent compared to last year.

Metal producers have cut production due to an inability to ship raw materials or finished products. A Shanghai Metals Market survey found that 6 of 12 copper rod plants in Shanghai’s neighboring provinces had halted or planned to halt output. Consequently, the purchase of raw materials is declining. In March, iron ore that is used in steelmaking and in construction was down 14.5 percent.

With transportation, construction, and manufacturing restricted, crude imports dropped by 14 percent year on year, and natural gas imports reached a low not seen since 2020.

Technology companies were already hampered by a shortage of raw materials and a regulatory crackdown. As the extreme lockdowns came, many firms terminated production. Among them were Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp., Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., and iPhone maker Foxconn Technology Group. As of April 13, 30 Taiwanese companies, including Pegatron Corp. and Macbook maker Quanta Computer Inc., had halted operations.

Other tech companies have adopted a closed-bubble system for employees. This may allow them to restart manufacturing, but they will still be plagued by the problems of shipping, transportation, and port congestion.

Compared to figures seen in February, passenger car sales in March decreased by 10.9 percent. Shanghai’s Tesla factory has been closed since March 28, while Volkswagen AG and Chinese EV maker Nio Inc. suspended production in April. Auto parts maker Robert Bosch GmbH (commonly known as Bosch) also closed two of its factories in April.

Domestic sales of excavators, a proxy

measure for the health of the construction sector, decreased by nearly 64 percent in March from last year.

Home sales dropped 53 percent last month from a year ago.

While residents under lockdown scramble to find food, the price of fresh vegetables has risen more than 17 percent nationwide. The National Bureau of Statistics’ data showed that farmers in the northeast, where much of China’s food comes from, were prevented by COVID restrictions from plowing their fields and sowing seeds. This can only add to food inflation and shortages in the coming year.

Consumer confidence and spending are down, with Bloomberg estimating that retail sales declined by 3 percent in March compared to 2021. While Beijing plans to inject economic stimulus, its effectiveness is limited if people are unwilling to spend.

Goldman Sachs is predicting a mere 4.5 percent GDP growth this year, but that number presumes that lockdowns will end at some point.

Xi remains adamant that he will stick to the zero-COVID policy and make it the top priority. All provinces have been told to prepare quarantine camps as lockdowns may be extended.

**Impact on the US**

China’s imports were down 0.1 percent in March, which is considered a lagging indicator. This means that if imports are down now, exports will be down later. A decline in imports is having a direct effect on China’s trading partners.

U.S. exports to China have already fallen by 11.6 percent. Meanwhile, for all of the talk over the past two years about diversifying supply chains, many U.S. companies are still dependent on China. For this reason, as Chinese exports decrease, the United States experiences supply chain disruption.

China’s March producer price index is currently up 8.3 percent. Factory gate inflation and the cost of goods at the factory are expected to rise even further, driving up the cost of imported consumer goods in the United States.

Inflation in the United States already stands at a 40-year high, and the situation in China will just make things worse.

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

*Antonio Graceffo, Ph.D., has spent more than 20 years in Asia. He is a graduate of the Shanghai University of Sport and holds a China-MBA from Shanghai Jiaotong University. Graceffo works as an economics professor and China economic analyst, writing for various international media. Some of his books on China include “Beyond the Belt and Road: China’s Global Economic Expansion” and “A Short Course on the Chinese Economy.”*

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CCP INFLUENCE

# Beijing’s Influence Group Seeks Partnership With State Agricultural Officials, After Teaming Up With Bill Gates for Years

FRANK FANG

A number of U.S. government officials recently took part in a virtual agriculture event co-hosted by a Beijing-backed influence association that has ties to Bill Gates.

The U.S. Heartland China Association (USHCA), a 501(c)3 nonprofit founded in 2003, held the 2022 U.S.-China Agriculture Roundtable earlier this month. The online event was co-hosted by the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC).

The Trump administration warned about CPAFFC. In February 2020, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called the association “the public face of the Chinese Communist Party’s official foreign influence agency, the United Front Work Department.”

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) uses the United Front Work Department (UFW) to run its foreign influence operations. In the United States, the CCP has also deployed grass-roots level “united front” groups as part of its effort to infiltrate U.S. civil and political institutions.

CPAFFC is “tasked with co-opting sub-national governments” and “has sought to directly and malignly influence state and local leaders to promote the PRC’s [People’s Republic of China] global agenda,” the U.S. State Department stated in October 2020, when it was designating another group, a Washington-based Chinese organization, as a foreign mission.

The roundtable featured a number of U.S. lawmakers and state officials, including Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur, Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Mike Beam, Missouri Director of Agriculture Chris Chinn, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig, and Rep. Darin LaHood (R-Ill.).

The 2022 roundtable event was initially reported by the National Pulse. The inaugural roundtable was held in April 2021.

The state-run Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) was one of the partners of the event. Several CASS officials and scholars also took part in the roundtable, including Wang Wei, director-general of the academy’s bureau of international cooperation.

Bob Holden, former Democratic governor of Missouri and current USHCA chairman and CEO, said during the roundtable’s opening ceremony that U.S.-Sino cooperation was “essential” to overcome global challenges, including “producing enough nutritious food to feed the growing population on the planet” and “preventing future pandemics of human, animal, and plant diseases.”

The online event comes at a time when China has been increasing its purchases of U.S. farmland over the past decade, prompting concerns about U.S. national security.

Gates has also been a major buyer of agricultural land in the United States. Land Report reported that Gates was the largest U.S. private farmland owner in January 2021, saying his family had accumulated an estimated 242,000 acres of farmland.

## Bill Gates

Microsoft founder Bill Gates has worked with CPAFFC over the years, in particular with the association’s previous president, Li Xiaolin, who held the position from September 2011 to April 2020.

Li is no ordinary Chinese citizen. She was a former member of the Chinese regime’s political advisory body, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). She’s also the daughter of former Chinese regime leader Li Xiannian, and her husband is Liu Yazhou, a retired general of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Air Force.

The 2022 roundtable event comes at a time when China has been increasing its purchases of U.S. farmland in the past decade, prompting concerns about U.S. national security.



Xiaolin, CEO of China Power International Development Ltd. on March 8, 2011.

FENG LIU/GETTY IMAGES



A farmer plants corn near Dwight, Ill., on April 23, 2020.

Gates and Li met face to face during the 2013 Global Vaccine Summit in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates. According to CPAFFC’s website, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation invited Li to the summit, during which she took part in a panel speaking about China’s immunization efforts to eradicate polio.

In August 2013, the foundation announced that it would invest \$5 million to “support Chinese investigators to drive research, development, and production of the ‘next generation toilet,’” as part of its global “Reinvent the Toilet Challenge.” According to the University of Science and Technology Beijing, a launch event in China was attended by Li, a China-based representative of the foundation, the university’s party secretary, and Chinese health officials.

Gates visited CPAFFC’s headquarters in China in June 2014, during which he gave a speech, titled “Invent for the Poor.” According to a video on CPAFFC’s website, Gates praised the Chinese regime and the association in his speech.

“Here in China, it is fantastic to see the investment in engineering and medical technology, all sorts of things that China is assuming a very, very strong positioning,” he said. “And so our hope for the Friendship Association is that together we can find these great ideas in China and that we can find the right partners in Africa and elsewhere, who can take these new tools and use them on behalf of the people.”

Mark Suzman, the foundation’s CEO, and Li both attended the World Philanthropy Forum held at China’s Tsinghua University in September 2016. According to China’s state-run media, Suzman applauded China for its “potential” in philanthropy works and for its “unique role” in Africa’s development.

Melinda French Gates, co-chair of the foundation, held a meeting with Li in China in July 2017. According to CPAFFC’s website, French Gates praised CPAFFC for its philanthropic works. She also invited Li to join the End Malaria Council (EMC), which is an initiative launched in part by Gates in 2017.

Li subsequently participated in an EMC meeting held in Beijing in April 2019, according to CPAFFC.

Gates and Li also have connections through another United Front agency, the Hong Kong-based China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), which is managed by CPAFFC. CUSEF identifies

**242K ACRES** Bill Gates was America’s largest private farmland owner in January 2021, having accumulated an estimated 242,000 acres, Land Report says.

Li as its vice chairman on its website and its 2013 report names Gates as a member of its steering committee.

CUSEF is headed by Chinese regime official Tung Chee-hwa, a former Hong Kong leader and current vice chairman of the CPPCC.

## CPAFFC

CPAFFC, which was established in 1954, has more than 300 local branches throughout China. Outside the Chinese borders, there are regional-level branches, such as the Chinese-Arab Friendship Association, as well as country-level branches, such as the China-U.S. People’s Friendship Association in the United States.

The current CPAFFC president is Lin Songtian, who began in the role in April 2020. Before then, he had been China’s ambassador to South Africa since 2017.

When Lin was in South Africa, he was an outspoken critic of the United States on Twitter. In March 2020, he amplified an unfounded conspiracy theory that the COVID-19 pandemic had originated from the U.S. military when he shared a now-notorious Twitter post by Zhao Lijian, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson.

In response to Zhao’s accusations, the U.S. State Department summoned China’s then-Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai.

In June 2020, Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas) released an interim report on the origins of COVID-19. The report criticized the Chinese regime, saying that the pandemic “could have been prevented” if Chinese officials had responded to the initial outbreaks in a “transparent and responsible manner.”

A month later, Lin wrote on Twitter that the interim report was intended to “shift blames and cover the delinquency of #Trump Administration.”

Lin also took to Twitter repeatedly to defend the communist regime’s policies targeting ethnic minorities in the far-western region of Xinjiang. In a December 2019 Twitter post, he wrote that China’s “vocational education and training centers,” which Western officials have described as



GREG BAKER/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

A watchtower in a high-security facility near a reeducation camp where mostly Muslim ethnic minorities are detained, on the outskirts of Hotan, Xinjiang region, China, on May 31, 2019.



GREG BAKER/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

A reeducation camp where mostly Muslim ethnic minorities are detained, north of Kashgar, Xinjiang region, China, on June 2, 2019.

“concentration camps,” were effective in ending “extremism” in Xinjiang.

China has used “combating extremism” as a pretext to lock up more than 1 million Uyghurs in Xinjiang while subjecting them to forced sterilization, forced labor, and other inhumane treatment. Both the Trump and Biden administrations have determined that China has committed “genocide” and “crimes against humanity” against the Uyghurs.

At the opening ceremony of the April roundtable, Lin said China and the United States should work together because the two sides “complement each other.” According to Lin, the United States has the advantage of having advanced technology, finances, and talent, while China possesses a large market and high domestic demand.

Representatives for the USHCA and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation didn’t respond to requests for comments by press time.

The activities of Chinese influence groups

in Italy, including CPAFFC, were the focus of a 2021 report by researchers at Sinopsis, a project by nonprofit AcaMedia z.u., in collaboration with the Department of Sinology at Charles University in Prague.

The report told government bodies, politicians, and political parties to “avoid interactions” with CPAFFC and other CCP influence agencies.

“The activities of these agencies and their fronts by-pass norms that require accountability of state-to-state relationships through ‘people-to-people,’ ‘cultural,’ ‘non-government’ or other labels,” the report reads. “Legislators should understand the nature of cooption and propaganda events to which they are invited as influence tools, rather than ‘dialogue’ partners.”

“Even attending them to express critical views allows the CCP to publicly present its interlocutors as endorsers of its platforms and narratives.”



PHILIPPE LOPEZ/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Jack Ma, CEO of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba, at the Vivattech startups and innovation fair in Paris on May 16, 2019.

## OPINION

# Beijing Tightens Grip on Ant Group, Ma’s Empire

FAN YU

The future of Ant Group, the Chinese fintech giant affiliated with Jack Ma and partially owned by e-commerce giant Alibaba, grows cloudier by the month.

The Chinese regime’s top anti-graft watchdog—the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI)—was directly involved in a recent inquiry into Ant’s relationship with state-owned enterprises, a Bloomberg report said, citing people familiar with the proceedings.

The involvement of the CCDI, a much-feared Chinese Communist Party (CCP) organ that typically oversees corruption investigations of senior CCP officials, could escalate the risks surrounding Ant, its billionaire founder Jack Ma, and its biggest shareholder, Alibaba Group. Specifically, the CCDI was looking into transactions between Ant and state-controlled entities, including banks and government agencies.

Ant, Alibaba, and Jack Ma have been under CCP regulatory scrutiny dating back two years. In late 2020, Ant, which runs the popular Alipay mobile payments application, was forced to abandon a potentially record-setting IPO in Hong Kong and Shanghai. The CCP then ordered Ant to restructure its business practices and went on to revamp the regulatory standards governing the entire fintech sector.

In January, following almost a year of inquiries, the CCP expelled former Hangzhou Party Secretary Zhou Jiangyong for corruption. Both Ant and Alibaba are headquartered in Hangzhou, the capital of China’s Zhejiang Province. Zhou was believed to be a huge proponent of Ma’s business empire, although Ant denied any improper business dealings.

By early 2022, a fresh round of investigations into Ant began, which at the time, Bloomberg described as “by far the most thorough and wide-ranging” to date. In April, it was revealed that the CCDI was involved in the probe.

Perhaps it shouldn’t be a huge surprise, given the message from a January CCDI plenum meeting that suggested that the regulator was focused on reining in the so-called “disorderly expansion of capital and platform monopolies” and “the link between power and capital.” This has been the CCP’s trendy slogan for combating systemic corruption lately, although it should be mentioned that such means of business building had been the modus operandi of Chinese entrepreneurs for decades.

Alibaba, Ant’s parent company, isn’t faring much better. China’s regulatory environment continues to hamper the internet giant. Last year, Beijing gave Alibaba’s e-commerce business a record \$2.8 billion fine for violating anti-monopoly rules.

The company’s cloud computing arm, Aliyun (Ali Cloud), continues to miss sales expectations as the CCP has begun promoting government-sponsored cloud computing networks to establish greater control over information and data.

Alibaba’s cloud computing platform had the potential to be a huge profit center—akin to the role Amazon Web Services has at Amazon—until the CCP’s recent crackdown on the industry.

Ant, Alibaba, and Jack Ma have been under CCP regulatory scrutiny dating back two years.

This all potentially bodes ill for Jack Ma, his business empire, and his lieutenants, such as Alibaba Chairman and CEO Daniel Zhang and Vice Chairman Joseph Tsai.

Tsai, in particular, was coincidentally the subject of a long April exposé by sports media giant ESPN, which called Tsai “the face of NBA’s uneasy China relationship.” Since 2019, Tsai has been the principal owner of the NBA’s Brooklyn Nets basketball franchise.

While Alibaba is facing scrutiny in China for potentially running afoul of the CCP’s political whims, the ESPN story in the United States puts one of Alibaba’s most visible leaders in a similarly uncomfortable light.

“Tsai has publicly defended some of China’s most controversial policies,” the article reads.

“He described the government’s brutal crackdown on dissent as necessary to promote economic growth; defended a law used to imprison scores of pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong as necessary to squelch separatism; and, when questioned about human rights, asserted that most of China’s 1.4 billion citizens are ‘happy about where they are.’”

The company and its executives are clearly walking a tightrope. One that may be getting thinner by the month.

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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NICOLAS ASFOURI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Microsoft founder Bill Gates speaks during the “Reinvented Toilet Expo” in Beijing on Nov. 6, 2018.



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