

WEEK 5, 2023

THE EPOCH TIMES

# CHINA INSIDER

People cross  
an intersection at  
a shopping district in  
Hong Kong on Oct.  
30, 2022.

# CHINA'S SLOWING ECONOMY

See Page 4





Falun Gong practitioners take part in a parade marking the 30th anniversary of the spiritual discipline's introduction to the public, in New York on May 13, 2022.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

# ‘A Crucial Message for All Human Beings’ Chinese Find Insight From Article by Founder of Falun Gong

DOROTHY LI

What’s the purpose of our lives? Legends from China and elsewhere say that divine beings created humans modeled in their own image. By following heaven’s commandments, humankind can enjoy a harmonious life, while waiting for the Creator’s return.

But communism detests these traditional ideas. Since it seized power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has repeatedly launched bloody campaigns to uproot traditional beliefs and values, destroying the bedrock of one of the world’s oldest civilizations.

By decimating China’s traditions and replacing them with communist ideology, the regime has indoctrinated generations into believing only in the CCP and its atheistic worldview. As a result, many have lost their connection to 5,000 years of Chinese culture and beliefs.

On the occasion of the Lunar New Year, Mr. Li Hongzhi, founder of the spiritual practice Falun Gong, published an article titled “How Humankind Came To Be,” enlightening Chinese people at home and abroad.

“It’s the first time for me to learn such a comprehensive explanation of how human beings came about,” said Gu Guoping, a former teacher at Shanghai University and a Shanghai resident who isn’t a Falun Gong adherent himself. “What Master Li said makes a lot of sense and is very thorough.”

Echoing his sentiment, Daniel Lou Xinyue, a Chinese American entrepreneur who lives in New York, was amazed by Mr. Li’s insight into the universe, including how it was created and structured.

“I have never heard of an explanation as clear as the one Mr. Li Hongzhi offered,” Lou told The Epoch Times.

Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, is a discipline rooted in ancient Chinese traditions that involves moral improvement, leading to spiritual enlightenment. The practice is composed of meditative exercises and a set of moral teachings centered on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance.

Lou has long been interested in historical and cultural classics. Growing up in Eastern culture, he had heard of the 18 realms of hell from Buddhist scriptures. He also explored works of Western religions, including the Bible, where he found descriptions of heaven.

But what’s the whole universe like? “No one ever clearly described it to me,” Lou said.



Daniel Lou in Staten Island, N.Y., on Oct. 8, 2019.

Reading Mr. Li’s piece is well worth the time and effort, he said, even if people aren’t interested in taking up the spiritual practice itself.

“I think the article has great importance to humankind as well as to the history of human thought,” he said.

Lou pointed to the first lines of the text to illustrate his reasoning.

In the article’s opening, Mr. Li states, “I am seeing imminent danger approaching humanity, and have been called upon by divine beings to pass along, for this reason, several things to everyone in this world.”

Mr. Li made it clear that there are divine beings, Lou said.

“Now, most people ... have forgotten that there are divine beings who control and maintain the order of the existing world,” Lou said.

“Why is this an era of moral decay? Because most human beings have forgotten the Creator and their divine. They have even forgotten that man has a soul, which was what Master Li described as the ‘true soul’ that will not die with the passing away of the physical body.”

Only by knowing this, Lou added, can humankind persist in doing good things, especially amidst painful experiences.

**COVID-19 and Retribution**  
Living in a country in the grips of a severe COVID-19 outbreak, Gu said he was

impressed by Mr. Li’s illustrations of the reasons behind the traditional idea of “you reap what you sow.”

In the article, Mr. Li states, “Everything that happens in one’s life—whether it seems warranted or not—is, in reality, the karmic consequence of what one did in one’s past lives, for better or for worse.”

Eastern culture has long held a belief that karma will be accrued with bad or immoral deeds and that this will be paid back in this life or the next.

This concept of karmic retribution, according to Gu, explains the uptick in deaths among officials and public figures closely aligned with the CCP amid the current COVID-19 crisis.

“[The CCP] has been procuring organs from living Falun Gong practitioners. That is an absolutely anti-human atrocity. That’s why the virus attacks [people aligned with the Party],” Gu said.

The CCP, which considered Falun Gong’s immense popularity to be a threat to the Party’s control, ordered a brutal suppression of the practice in 1999, resulting in an estimated 100 million adherents being targets of detention, torture, and forced organ harvesting.

In 2019, an independent tribunal found that the communist regime had killed prisoners of conscience for their organs to supply the transplant market “on a significant scale” for years, with no evidence that the

practice had stopped. The main victims, the tribunal said, have been detained Falun Gong practitioners.

Now, with COVID-19 spreading like wild-fire across the nation, Gu said Mr. Li’s article could help Chinese people reexamine their lives.

“[The article] is a reminder for people to reevaluate how they live their lives and view the world,” Gu said. “It’s vital and timely.”

**Important to Humanity**  
Since reading the piece, Lou has already begun to see his daily life and goals through a new lens.

“This article changed how I view the world, life, as well as my attitude,” he said. “It makes me more determined to stay kind and do good things.”

While he doesn’t practice Falun Gong, Lou said he has recommended Mr. Li’s article to his friends.

“Previously, Mr. Li’s teachings were only for Falun Gong disciples. But now, Mr. Li is delivering messages to all human beings,” he said.

“In my understanding, Mr. Li wants more people to be saved at this time.

“I kept sharing this article. ... I think everyone should do so because it’s such a crucial message for all human beings, no matter whether you’re in the West or the East. I recommend it to everyone.”

*Shi Ping and Luo Ya contributed to this report.*



A mourner carries a photo of a loved one at funeral home in Shanghai on Jan. 14, 2023.

COVID IN CHINA

# Overloaded Crematoriums in Shanghai Point to Surging Death Toll

JENNY LI & DOROTHY LI

As tens of millions of Chinese carrying luggage and gifts traveled for long-awaited family reunions, grieving relatives struggled to get their loved ones to their final resting place ahead of the Lunar New Year.

Interviews with staff at five funeral homes in Shanghai on Jan. 18 revealed that the waiting times to get a cremation slot were extended as far as early February, even as furnace ovens have been operating until late at night and early dawn to cater to the surging demand amid an explosive COVID-19 outbreak.

Yishan Funeral Home, the city’s largest funeral home, with 22 high-efficiency cremators, is one month behind in delivering cremated remains, while the second-largest, Pudong Funeral Home, has a two-week delay for cremation.

Hu Liren, a U.S.-based businessman originally from Shanghai, said his friend had to wait 19 days to cremate his late mother, who passed away in Dongqiao town in Shanghai on Jan. 11.

Still, local officials have been seeking to downplay the severity of the crisis. On Jan. 17, authorities in Shanghai said the COVID-19 outbreak had been on “an obvious downward trend” since late December 2022, with visits to fever clinics and emergency rooms declining. Health authorities also claimed that “the current outbreaks in Shanghai have now passed the peak.”

But China’s official infection and death tolls have been viewed as markedly undercounting the impact of the COVID-19 crisis by health experts abroad, including those at the World Health Organization. As researchers turn to anecdotal evidence on the ground to gauge the impact on global health, more than a dozen of governments around the world have mandated COVID-19 tests or imposed other precautionary measures on travelers from China.

While it’s hard to know the true number of fatalities, the overloaded crematoriums in Shanghai, echoing similar scenes playing out in other Chinese cities, offer a glimpse into the toll of the unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak that’s barreling through the country.

“If you asked a Chinese person whether there are elderly passed away in their family, the majority of them would say yes,” Hu said in an interview with The Epoch Times on Jan. 16. Hu’s father, who was in his 90s, died of COVID-19 in Shanghai in December 2022. He noted that at least four of his friends lost their parents in recent days.

Even scalpers have cashed in on the vast demand for cremation. In Shanghai, scalpers were selling queue numbers in a funeral home to desperate families for 1,500 to 2,000 yuan (\$221 to \$294), according to a notice from the city’s public security bureau. It noted that 20 scalpers were arrested at the city’s Baoxing Funeral Parlor on Dec. 29, 2022.

**Unreliable Official Data**  
Facing mounting criticism over the transparency of its public health data, Chinese authorities recently started to release death figures that fell beyond its narrow criteria of COVID-19 mortality, which is limited to patients who died from respiratory failure after catching COVID-19.

The regime has reported roughly 78,000 COVID-19 deaths since early December 2022 when it lifted the nearly-three-year-old zero-COVID policy. But experts say this number is



People wait for funeral service for their deceased relatives at Baoxing Funeral Parlor in Shanghai on Jan. 4, 2023.

**If you asked a Chinese person whether there are elderly passed away in their family, the majority of them would say yes.**

Hu Liren, a U.S.-based businessman originally from Shanghai

a vast undercount, pointing to the widespread accounts of overloaded crematoriums and hospitals, as well as the regime’s record of covering up COVID-related information in a bid to downplay news that it deems harmful to its image.

In one estimation, as many as 6 million bodies could have been cremated over the past month, if the crematoriums were running 24/7, according to Sean Lin, virologist and former lab director at the viral disease branch of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. But Lin said that this figure was still a conservative estimate, given that more people living in rural villages may not have access to such services and bury the deceased in the ground. Taking this into account, the death toll could’ve reached 10 million, he said.

Despite the grim outbreak situation, the regime has sought to assure the public that the latest wave had peaked—a message that appears to have failed to convince the public.

“We are very anxious at this moment. We are living in fear because there is no data, no reports. We have no idea of what’s happening at all,” a woman in Nanjing told The Epoch Times on Jan. 24.

The woman, who asked only to be identified



by her surname Su for fear of reprisals, noted that the lack of reliable data made her worry about another wave of outbreaks.

**Anger and Distrust**  
For some families who lost their loved ones, their grief is mixed with anger.

Guan Yao, a Chinese IT professional who now lives in California, criticized the authorities’ lack of preparation for the sudden reopening, especially for the elderly.

Since the outbreak first hit Wuhan in late 2019, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had vowed to eliminate every infection among communities through repeated testings, swift lockdowns, and prolonged quarantine in spite of the growing economic and human toll. But following massive street protests against the suffocating pandemic controls in late November 2022, the regime abruptly dismantled most of its hallmark zero-COVID policy, leaving the underprepared health system under enormous strain.

“Of course, I support lifting [COVID] restrictions. But the Chinese Communist Party hasn’t done any preparation during the past three years. ... Opening up like this is at the expense of Chinese people,” Guan told The Epoch Times on Jan. 19.

Guan said the authorities could’ve used the resources they used in the mass testing over the past three years for importing medicines or doing other preparations.

“But they didn’t do so,” he said

Guan, who’s originally from Beijing, lost five family members in December 2022, including his grandmother who passed away on Dec. 22, 2022. He believed the trigger of his grandmother’s death was COVID-19, although the death certificate said the cause was kidney failure. The official death toll is “completely unreliable,” he said.

The CCP is responsible for the deaths of his relatives, as well as countless Chinese, Guan said.

*Daisy Lee, Chang Chun, Yi Ru, and Eva Fu contributed to this report.*

TRUTH and TRADITION

READ WHAT OTHERS WON'T REPORT

SUBSCRIBE TODAY ReadEpoch.com



ECONOMY

# China’s Population Crisis

EMEL AKAN

China, the world’s most populous country, has reached a turning point in history as it recently announced its first population decline in 60 years. China analysts predict severe problems for the world’s second-largest economy, owing in part to its shrinking population.

According to Beijing critics, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has spent decades attempting to boost domestic scientific and technological innovation by any means possible, including theft. However, they believe that China’s goal of overtaking the U.S. economy by the 2030s or 2050s is now a pipe dream.

The country’s National Bureau of Statistics reported a population decline of roughly 850,000 to a total of 1.41 billion in 2022. This is the first drop that the regime has officially reported since 1961, the final year of the country’s Great Famine, which was estimated to have killed at least 40 million people.

Some estimates suggest that China’s current population decline could be higher than reported due to rising COVID-19 death tolls.

Even under the most optimistic scenarios, China will lose a significant portion of its population, according to Gordon Chang, a distinguished senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute and author of “The Coming Collapse of China.”

When fertility rates and other factors are considered, “China will probably lose about two-thirds of its population between now and 2100,” Chang told The Epoch Times.

“That’s about a billion people,” he said. “So, I don’t know how any society can withstand that.”

When the CCP noticed the dwindling population, it abandoned its one-child policy in 2016, replacing it with a two-child limit. Despite the change, China’s birth rate has continued to decline. The birth rate in 2022 was the lowest on record, dropping to 6.77 per 1,000 people from 7.52 in 2021.

According to Christopher Balding, an expert on the Chinese economy and a former professor at HSBC Business School of Peking University, China’s population drop isn’t shocking. He also believes that the decline began nearly five to seven years ago, and the CCP is finally recognizing it.

However, the collapse of the working-age population is a bigger issue than the

**Their pension system is wildly underfunded. ... You’ve already seen either bailouts of some of the local provincial pension funds or recapitalization of them.**

Christopher Balding, Chinese economy expert



Employees work on an assembly line producing speakers at a factory in Fuyang, Anhui Province, China, on Sept. 30, 2022.

overall population decline, Balding told The Epoch Times. The share of the working-age population, which includes 15- to 59-year-old individuals, has fallen to 62 percent from more than 70 percent a decade ago.

China will miss out on the rapid economic expansion that’s generally enjoyed by countries with a young population, he noted, saying that India and Vietnam, both of which have very young demo-

graphics, are likely to be key beneficiaries of China’s population collapse.

“China is not going to be the consumption golden goose that we expected it to be,” Balding said.

Beijing is aware of these challenges and has invested heavily in technology in recent years in an effort to avert a grim outlook for the economy.

There are already signals of weakness



SAMIRA BOUAOU/THE EPOCH TIMES



Gordon Chang in New York on Jan. 3, 2023.

People walk on a pedestrian crossing in Shanghai on Jan. 16, 2023.

spreading across the economy: Trade activity is down, inflation is slowing, and new bank lending is tumbling. And this is despite Chinese authorities defying global trends by implementing monetary and fiscal easing this year. The stimulus measures aren’t having the desired impact since domestic demand remains subdued.

In 2022, China’s economy grew at one of its slowest rates in decades. Many media sources and experts attribute this weak economic performance to repeated lockdowns that hit households and businesses.

With the population decline, “China is on a trajectory to become poor,” according to Antonio Graceffo, China economic analyst and an Epoch Times contributor.

“China is in a situation that we call ‘old poor,’ which means that as much as we tell China’s economic growth is being exceptional, China is really still a poor country,” he told The Epoch Times.

Normally, countries can compensate for declining birth rates through money and technology to preserve their quality of living, as seen in Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and the majority of Western Europe, he explained. However, China has never caught up to the developed world.

“China got stuck in this low-end manufacturing,” he said, noting that the notion that the country is shifting into high-end manufacturing is untrue.

“I don’t believe China will surpass the United States.”

The share of the working-age population, which includes 15- to 59-year-old individuals, has fallen to 62 percent from more than 70 percent a decade ago.



Iris Tao, a reporter for The Epoch Times’ sister media NTD, reports from the White House on Jan. 27, 2023.

# Reporter for Epoch Times’ Sister Media Outlet Robbed at Gunpoint in Washington

EVA FU

A reporter with The Epoch Times’ sister media outlet was robbed at gunpoint on Jan. 28 right outside her apartment complex in Washington, D.C., raising concerns about the area’s rising crime rate as well as questions about whether the robbery was more than a random act. “Give me your phone,” was the first thing that Iris Tao, a White House reporter for NTD, heard right as she stepped outside the apartment complex.

Tao was confronted by a slim black man about 6 feet tall, wearing black from head to toe, including a black ski mask, black hat, black coat, and black pants with white stripes, the reporter recalled. He pointed a handgun at her, from about two feet away.

It was about 8:30 a.m., with no one else around. Before she could react, the man reached directly into the pocket of her puffer jacket where the phone was and snatched it from her, she said.

“Give me your wallet,” the man then demanded. “Otherwise, I’m going to hit you and smack you,” Tao recalled to The Epoch Times. The man also asked for Tao’s laptop, but pressed for her wallet when she maintained that she had only books with her.

With no other choice, she removed a pencil case that contained only a metro card from her backpack. The man, apparently uninterested, demanded her phone password. When Tao refused, he hit her in the face with the gun, leaving a red mark on her cheek before he dashed off into a nearby apartment building.

“Once he started running away from me, I started yelling: ‘Help, help, help,’” Tao said. Two neighbors came out and helped Tao call the police.

While the man was seen on camera entering a building a block away, police were unable to enter the structure. When Tao last checked her phone location signal a few hours later before losing access, the man was in a different building about a 15-minute drive away.

The neighborhood in southwest D.C. where Tao lives, about two miles from the Capitol, has a historically high crime rate. Tao learned from Officer Michael Kim from the city police’s Asian Liaison Office, who has worked in the area for about a decade. Kim suspects the man lives nearby, since he has security access to that building, according to Tao.

D.C. police didn’t respond by press time to an inquiry from The Epoch Times about the case.

From Jan. 1 through Jan. 27, the Metropolitan Police Department recorded 2,190 crimes, including 156 robberies, up 16 percent from the same period in 2022.

U.S. neighborhood analytics database NeighborhoodScout gives Washington a ranking of 2 out of 100 on safety scores, and describes it as “safer than 2 percent of U.S. cities.”

While Tao was calm throughout the incident, different scenarios later started to

play out in her head.

“If I tried to fight him, would he try to actually shoot me or hit me even worse?” she wondered.

Still unsure about how she became a target, Tao nonetheless observed multiple unusual points about the encounter that she can’t quite answer.

“Why would he be right outside of our apartment?” she said.

Unlike most scenarios, in which a thief might demand money, the man seemed to show more interest in her phone and laptop than cash. In addition, he somehow knew she was carrying a phone even though it wasn’t visible from the outside, and he reached right away for the correct pocket.

The fact that he asked for the phone pin code was “even more suspicious,” Tao said, as normally such phones would be wiped and resold, and therefore access to the phone is unnecessary.

Tao counted herself lucky for coming off only slightly injured, but that wasn’t the case for Sarah Liang, a reporter with the Hong Kong edition of The Epoch Times.

**Why would he be right outside of our apartment?**

Iris Tao, reporter, NTD Television Network

In May 2021, Liang was assaulted by a man wielding an aluminum bat outside her apartment building that left her with bruises on both legs, the latest in a series of attacks believed to have been orchestrated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a campaign to silence independent reporting. From its inception, The Epoch Times has drawn the ire of the regime in Beijing for its unfiltered reporting of the CCP’s vast rights abuses and corruption.

A month prior to the attack, Liang had noticed a man stalking her outside a local transit station, and two days earlier, a different man claiming to be delivering a large package knocked on her door and addressed her by name. The man claimed the package was sent from someone overseas, but Liang didn’t recognize the sender and wasn’t expecting any delivery. The facial features of both men were partly obscured by masks.

Three days before the armed robbery, Tao was at a White House press briefing with John Kirby, the spokesman for the White House National Security Council.

“Does the U.S. believe that new number by the Chinese government saying that there’s been 70,000 deaths?” she asked.

“We have continued to encourage the Chinese to be cooperative with international reviews and studies about COVID, and they have not been fully transparent,” Kirby said in response. “And we cannot speak to the veracity of those numbers. We urge China to be fully transparent about what’s going on.”

THE  
EPOCH  
TIMES

TRUTH *and* TRADITION

# A NEWSPAPER THE FOUNDING FATHERS WOULD READ

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

ReadEpoch.com





Taliban terrorists stand in front of a sign at the international airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Sept. 9, 2021.

CCP INFLUENCE

# China’s Recent \$540 Million Oil Deal With Taliban Reveals Its Broader Agenda in Afghanistan: Experts

VENUS UPADHAYAYA

A recent oil deal between the Taliban and Beijing has raised concerns about communist China’s larger economic and geo-political agendas in the violence-inflicted nation.

Experts say the Chinese regime wants to take advantage of the vacuum created by the American exit, eyeing more than \$1 trillion worth of Afghanistan’s minerals including rare earth elements, while outwitting other regional competitors.

Taliban recently signed a 25-year contract with China’s Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Co (CAPEIC) to extract oil from an area of 4,500 square kilometers of Amu Darya basin in Afghanistan’s three northern provinces of Sarpol, Jawzjan, and Faryab, according to a statement on Twitter by Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Taliban-run administration.

“The company (CAPEIC) will invest \$150 million in one year and \$540 million in the next three years. In this contract, the [Taliban administration] will be a 20% partner, and this share will increase to 75%,” said Mujahid. “About 3,000 Afghans will be employed in this project.”

The deal, which is the first agreement between the Taliban and any foreign company since the former took over Afghanistan in August 2021, ensures that oil is processed in Afghanistan, and termination can happen if the CAPEIC doesn’t meet

An unstable Afghanistan is fine by China as long as they have access to these resources and the regime keeps a curb on Uyghur activity.

Aparna Pande, research fellow, Hudson Institute

its material obligations within a year.

Aparna Pande, a research fellow at the Washington-based Hudson Institute, said China has for decades been interested in gaining access to Afghanistan’s trillion dollars worth of natural resources, both energy and minerals.

“An unstable Afghanistan is fine by China as long as they have access to these resources and the regime keeps a curb on Uyghur activity,” Pande told The Epoch Times.

The erstwhile U.S.-backed Afghan regime signed a similar deal with the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) to develop oil blocks in the Amu Darya basin in December 2011. Work on this project was halted in 2013 and the Chinese staff left the country after disagreements emerged about the transportation route of oil from Afghanistan to China. It was also under threat by the Taliban insurgency.

The Xinjiang branch of PetroChina was a subsidiary of CNPC and the CAPEIC was restructured from it in June 2000, according to the China Project.

Ahmad Rashid Salim, a best-selling author, community leader, and an academician in California who researches and teaches on topics in the fields of Islamic studies, Farsi literature, and Afghanistan, called it an “astonishingly bad deal” and said the de-facto Taliban regime doesn’t have the authority nor the public backing for the deal.

“The Chinese government with its historic and current record of violence and human rights abuses, especially against the Uyghur Muslims, is looking at the Doha deal between the Taliban and the U.S., as an excellent opportunity to sweep into Afghanistan and exploit the country’s natural and historical resources,” Salim told The Epoch Times in an email.

According to official figures, Afghanistan has 300 documented copper deposits with 30 million metric tons (MTs) of copper, 2.3 billion MTs of iron ore deposits in western Afghanistan along the Herat fault system through central Afghanistan and north of the Panjshir valley and possibly into Badakhshan, and 1.4 million MTs of rare earth materials.

Mining has also been the second largest revenue source for the Taliban after narcotics, according to multiple sources, and even before taking over Kabul. Taliban officials have previously gone on record about the group earning over \$400 million annually

from its overall mining operation. While it was operating mines in areas under its control, it was attacking mines under the control of the erstwhile Afghan regime.

The former Afghan regime had signed a \$3 billion, 30-year agreement in 2008 with the Chinese state joint venture of Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) and Jiaoxi Copper Ltd for mining operations at the Mes Aynak copper deposit near Kabul in Logar province. A 2000-year-old Buddhist heritage site also sits at the location.

The project faced logistics impediments from the very beginning and was halted in 2014 due to continued attacks and violence, including from the Taliban.

Five Afghan policemen died when the Taliban attacked a checkpoint at the Mes Aynak copper mine in March 2020. However, a year later when the Taliban took over Kabul, it tried to revive the same project with promises of adequate security to the Chinese.

Multiple meetings have reportedly already happened between the Taliban and MCC which is taking advantage of the situation and trying to renegotiate terms—reduce taxes and slash by half the 19.5 percent royalty rate owed to the Afghan government per ton of copper sold. The current status of the project is not yet clear.

Lifeline for the Taliban

Taliban has not been recognized as a legitimate regime by any nation, including Beijing, and is facing vulnerable times and increased violence from other militant groups like Islamic State who now threaten Taliban-operated mines.

Beijing has, however, accepted Taliban-appointed diplomats. While the recently signed oil deal has raised concerns about Beijing providing legitimacy to the Taliban, experts have refuted such claims.

“No, these deals do not legitimize the Taliban but they do show a willingness of China to work with the Taliban despite the danger to Chinese Nationals working in Afghanistan and the atrocious human rights record that the Taliban continues to uphold like banning girls and women from education and work and the recent return of public executions,” said Brent Edward Huffman, an American filmmaker who directed the 2015 documentary “Saving Mes Aynak.”

Huffman’s documentary played an in-

strumental role in bringing global focus on the Buddhist heritage site at risk from mining at Mes Aynak. The filmmaker expressed surprise that the oil deal was reached despite an attack by ISIS on a Kabul hotel that wounded five Chinese nationals in December.

“This new oil deal with Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum shows this company believes this resource extraction, as well as future extraction at other sites, is potentially worth more than the safety of Chinese Nationals in Afghanistan,” said Huffman.

Chinese companies actually have larger plans for business expansion in Afghanistan after the Taliban approved the construction of a \$216 million Sino-Afghan industrial estate on the outskirts of Kabul last April. The estate is expected to host 150 factories.

Lithium

With Chinese presence and its intentions to fill in the power vacuum left by the Americans, things thus appear more complex because China is eyeing more than just oil and copper. China has a near-monopoly on the global processing of rare earth elements and is interested in the Afghan lithium reserves.

This poses a strategic challenge to the United States’ and Europe’s green energy transition, according to Brookings think tank, which said in a report last year that the Afghan rare earth minerals could be of great significance for Chinese agendas.

Afghanistan’s lithium can be a crucial component of China-manufactured large-capacity batteries for electric vehicles and clean-energy storage systems. The nation also has other rare earth elements like copper, nickel, and cobalt, which could be China’s trump card for a transition to green energy sources, said a Brookings report titled “Chinese investment in Afghanistan’s lithium sector: A long shot in the short term.”

The country’s lithium reserves are so significant that they are said to potentially rival Bolivian reserves, currently the largest in the world. The Chinese are also a major investor in Bolivian reserves. But it’s not known if there’s currently a Taliban-China deal being negotiated on lithium extraction.

But China is not the only foreign investor in the Afghan mineral sector. There’s also buzz about other countries like Turkey, Russia, and Iran entering the arena.

Iranian ambassador to Kabul, Hassan Kazemi-Qomi told the Bazar news agency on Jan. 11 that the mining sector in Afghanistan currently provides good opportunities.

“Now is the best opportunity to invest in Afghanistan’s mines and we encourage Iranian investors to invest in Afghanistan,” said Kazemi-Qomi. Taliban’s Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum Sheikh Shahabuddin Delawar also requested Iran for investments in the sector.

The Taliban has also suggested using Afghan minerals, including lithium, to pay for Russian oil imports. Taliban Minister of Industry and Trade Nuriddin Azizi last year headed a Taliban delegation to Moscow to boost trade ties and encourage investments and touted that Afghanistan has “very good and high-quality lithium.”

The Brookings report said that with this kind of competition for mineral resources already emerging in Afghanistan, the Chinese have already started to strategize



Afghanistan’s former Mining Minister Waheedullah Shahrani (C) from the erstwhile Afghan government addresses a press conference in Kabul on June 17, 2010. Shahrani said his country’s mineral deposits could be worth up to 3 trillion dollars, tripling an earlier estimate by US geologists.

to dominate the sector.

The report added there’s limited information about any existing or future lithium extraction deals between the Taliban and Beijing.

“This suggests that while China is willing to acquire concessions, its primary interest may be blocking other players’ access to these resources,” it stated.

The report said that western investors are unlikely to enter the Afghan mining sector due to the risk of sanctions and thus the “leading candidate” to step forward would be China. This will obviously involve outbidding competitors.

Huffman agreed, saying that “China will likely have the deepest pockets and will outbid international competitors.”

Environmental Concerns

CAPEIC’s activities in the Central Asian Amu Darya basin have drawn environmental concerns. In 2010, the same company signed a contract for a power generation and supply project for the part of the Amu Darya river basin located in Turkmenistan, just across the Afghan border.

The Amu Darya river basin, which covers territory in Turkmenistan and part of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan, is the largest gas-bearing basin in Central Asia and the third largest in the world.

The early years of the Great Game in the 1800s, a political and military confrontation between the former British and Russian empires over Afghanistan and surrounding areas, included many exploratory expeditions in the region including one to find the origin of the Amu Darya river.

The basin is thus already suffering from an ecological catastrophe with the Aral sea, which is connected with the Amu Darya, having shrunk to 40 percent of its original size in the last four decades. Many studies blame the former Soviet

I imagine ecological devastation will be a major result of these new deals with the Taliban.

Brent Edward Huffman, director of the 2015 documentary “Saving Mes Aynak.”

Union’s policies and pollution for this degradation.

Experts believe that with China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive infrastructure investment project, targeting Central Asia including Afghanistan, the region today is more at risk than it was during the Great Game period or the Cold War.

“China is more strategic and pointed than the Soviets were,” said Pande.

The European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS), a Netherlands-based think tank, said in a commentary on Jan. 13 that China’s strategy in the region is consistent with its policy elsewhere to exploit vulnerable neighbors.

“That fits in perfectly with China’s consistent policy of preying on vulnerable and deeply distressed nations, mainly, but not exclusively, through entrapment in a vicious cycle of debt and steep repayment of debt via the BRI. Most other countries would view investments or projects in today’s Afghanistan as not being worth the risk in the existing unstable milieu, but not Beijing,” said EFSAS.

For its vested interests, the Chinese regime is thus not shy from signing deals with “pariahs” who until very recently were globally recognized as terrorists, it said.

Huffman is concerned that increased mining by the Chinese in Afghanistan will endanger the fragile ecology of the basin and also the many heritage sites in the country that need identification and conservation.

“There are ancient cultural heritage sites in nearly every corner of Afghanistan and deals like this threaten these sites and increase the risk of looting by the Taliban to sell to countries like China,” he said.

“I am sure ecological concerns like protecting the Amu Darya river are not part of these recently signed contracts. I imagine ecological devastation will be a major result of these new deals with the Taliban,” he added.

The Brookings report said that with this kind of competition for mineral resources already emerging in Afghanistan, the Chinese have already started to strategize to dominate the sector.



WAKIL KOHSAR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

This photograph taken on May 17, 2022, show an archaeological site in Mes Aynak, in the eastern province of Logar. - An ancient Buddhist city carved out of immense peaks near Kabul is in danger of disappearing forever, swallowed up by a Chinese consortium exploiting one of the world’s largest copper deposits.

THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH and TRADITION

A NEWSPAPER GEORGE WASHINGTON WOULD READ

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

ReadEpoch.com





[The Epoch Times is] a great paper beyond current events—the arts [section] is awesome (and my favorite). I read mine and leave it at the coffee house or other places for others to enjoy. **When I share it, people love it.**  
— DONNA LEE NYZIO

# 7 Ways to Share The Epoch Times With Your Friends and Family



Like us, you’re probably a fan of fact-based journalism that lets you make up your own mind. If you think we do a good job, please help spread the word to the Americans who still remember a time when newspapers were just about the facts. Your words and actions may be just what they’ve been waiting for.

- 1

**PASS ON** THE EPOCH TIMES

Done with your weekly paper? Pass it along to a friend, family member, neighbor, or coworker who could use honest news.
- 2

**LEAVE BEHIND** THE EPOCH TIMES

Leave your copy of The Epoch Times in a coffee shop, waiting room, barbershop, or any other place with reading material after you’re done with it.
- 3

**TALK ABOUT** THE EPOCH TIMES

Tell your friends and family about The Epoch Times—in a time when many people don’t know what to trust anymore, a recommendation from someone they trust can go a long way.
- 4

**REPRESENT\*** THE EPOCH TIMES

Our posters and bumper stickers are available for purchase at **EpochShop.com**, so you can be loud and proud about your support for Truth and Tradition.

- 5

**FORWARD** THE EPOCH TIMES

Did you know that all articles in our Morning Brief email can be read by non-subscribers too? It’s our way of making sure crucial information gets to the public, whether they’re a subscriber or not. Forwarding our Morning Brief\*\* email can help reach people who have to “see it to believe it.” You can also share our posts on Facebook and YouTube with your social network to spread the word, when possible.
- 6

**GIVE** THE EPOCH TIMES

Epoch Times gift subscriptions are a thoughtful present for the man or woman who has everything but a reliable source of information.  
**ReadEpoch.com/gift**
- 7

**REQUEST** THE EPOCH TIMES

For those folks who need to try before they buy (or those who just like newspaper smell), we’ve got you covered. Give us the name and shipping address of your friends or family members, and we’ll mail a sample copy to their doorstep at no cost to you or them.

\* (1) Please log into your account at TheEpochTimes.com (2) Click your name to manage your account (3) Click “Request Free Papers” on the left menu bar and follow steps  
\*\* Your friends and family can read the articles in MORNING BRIEF for FREE. They may meet different paywalls if they read other articles, which are not listed in MORNING BRIEF.

**Not a subscriber yet?** Visit [ReadEpoch.com](https://www.readepoch.com) to learn more.

