



## HONG KONG, XINJIANG, AND TIBET

May 3, 2024

Few policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under the leadership of General Secretary Xi Jinping have roiled China's relations with Western countries like those regarding the **Hong Kong Special Administrative Region**, the **Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region**, and the **Tibet Autonomous Region**. Xi's action in June 2020 to bring Hong Kong under more direct mainland control through a draconian National Security Law has undermined confidence in Beijing's "one country, two systems" policy, which promised 50 years of autonomy for the former British colony after its reversion to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Revelations that the CCP since 2017 has been operating extrajudicial detention centers and an alleged forced labor program in Xinjiang, violating the human rights of one to two million ethnic minority citizens (mostly Uyghurs), have sparked outrage and prompted economic sanctions. Repression of Tibetan populations and Tibetan Buddhists has attracted fewer headlines in recent years, but the CCP retains as staunch a policy approach there as it does those other regions.

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### Institutions

#### *Hong Kong*

The CCP's top policymaking institution on Hong Kong affairs is the **Central Leading Group on Hong Kong and Macao Affairs (CLGHKMA)**. It reports to the elite 24-member Politburo and its 7-member Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), which discusses and approves top-level policy decisions regarding Hong Kong. The leader of the CLGHKMA is typically the Executive Vice Premier, who sits on the PSC; the Minister of Public Security (who is concurrently a State Councilor) and the Director of the Central Hong Kong and Macao Work Office both serve as deputy leaders. The presence of the Minister of Public Security on this body reflects Beijing's increasing focus on political security in the territory. The CLGHKMA was founded in 1978 as the Central Group on Hong Kong and Macao. It was upgraded to the Central Coordination Group on Hong Kong and

Macao Affairs in 2003 after half a million Hongkongers marched against a proposed local National Security Law, and then upgraded again to a central leading group in 2020 following record-breaking protests in Hong Kong against a bill to allow extradition to the mainland. Other CLGHKMA members usually include the Director of the CCP United Front Work Department, the Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Office, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Party Secretary and Governor of Guangdong Province (which borders Hong Kong and Macao), and the Directors of Beijing's Liaison Offices in Hong Kong and Macao.

From 1978 to 2023, the General Office of the CLGHKMA and the groups that preceded it were in the ministerial-level State Council Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (SCHKMAO), which was responsible for supervising the implementation of Beijing's policies toward Hong Kong. However, the party-state institutional reforms announced in March 2023 established the **Central Hong Kong and Macao Work Office (CHKMWO)** under the CCP Central Committee; it took over the SCHKMAO's duties as the General Office of the CLGHKMA. These duties include conducting research, coordinating between mainland and local governments, and supervising implementation regarding polices such as "one country, two systems," Beijing's political leadership, Beijing's legal framework, upholding national security, safeguarding people's livelihoods, and integrating Hong Kong and Macao into China's overall development. CHKMWO will retain the SCHKMAO moniker, but a separate SCHKMAO will no longer exist—in effect transferring responsibility for Hong Kong policy from the state to the party.

Beijing's main presence in Hong Kong since 2000 has been the **Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKLO)**. The HKLO is a ministerial-level institution that is usually coterminous with the party's Central Hong Kong Work Committee (CHKWC), which leads the CCP's work in Hong Kong. The HKLO is led by a mainland official, and its responsibilities include promoting Beijing's interests in Hong Kong politics, encouraging exchanges with the mainland, helping liaise between mainland and Hong Kong authorities, and organizing and lobbying for pro-Beijing politicians. The HKLO also owns the media entities *Ta Kung Pao*, *Wen Wei Po*, *Commercial Daily*, and Sino United Publishing. There is an analogous but mainly symbolic Office of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China in Beijing (BJO).

The Hong Kong National Security Law, passed in Beijing in June 2020, led to the establishment the next month of the deputy ministerial-level **Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (OSNS)**. The OSNS is a mainland agency directly subordinate to the CCP Central Committee that is not subject to Hong Kong law but can make laws for the territory. It has a different leader than the HKLO but is similarly led and staffed by mainland officials. Its duties are to conduct analysis, make recommendations, supervise local authorities, collect intelligence, and

handle criminal cases related to Beijing's concept of national security in Hong Kong. Its jurisdiction is technically limited to cases that involve supposed foreign interference, that local authorities are unable to address, or that constitute a major imminent threat to national security. Beijing must approve OSNS involvement in any case.

Two other mainland institutions maintain an official presence in Hong Kong. Since the handover in 1997, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has, as stipulated in the Basic Law, supervised Hong Kong's external relations through a deputy ministerial-level **Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (MOFACO)**. The handover also saw China's military establish the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Hong Kong Garrison, which is a roughly 10,000-person force that is responsible for defending the territory and reports to the PLA Southern Theater Command, headquartered in Guangzhou. The Fourth Bureau of the Ministry of State Security handles intelligence work in Hong Kong.

Many other Chinese political institutions exert some influence in Hong Kong affairs. The 175-member **Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC)**, which is the main lawmaking body of China's national legislature, holds the power to interpret the Basic Law of Hong Kong and to make laws for Hong Kong. Most notably, it drafted and promulgated the Hong Kong National Security Law in June 2020 and amended the Basic Law in March 2021 to introduce electoral changes designed to ensure that only pro-Beijing "patriots" could hold government posts. Founded in 1997, the **NPCSC Committee on the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region** is a ministerial-level working organ of the national legislature with responsibility for studying and advising on the NPCSC's powers regarding Hong Kong legislation and the interpretation and amendment of the Hong Kong Basic Law. It comprises six mainland members and six Chinese citizens with permanent residency rights in Hong Kong. Additionally, there are 36 delegates from Hong Kong among the 2,980 members of the full NPC.

Hong Kong is one of several focal points of the party's United Front work, which aims to mobilize nonparty personnel and social groups to support the party's objectives. This work is led by the **United Front Work Department (UFWD)**, a ministerial-level functional department under the CCP Central Committee that is usually empowered through the leadership of a deputy national-level Director. Xi enhanced the UFWD's influence after the 20th Party Congress by making an incoming Politburo member its leader the first time since 1977. The UFWD Third Bureau is responsible for building and mobilizing political support for the party among locals in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. The outward-facing pillar of United Front work is the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a national advisory body that expands the party's reach to influential nonmembers and provides policy suggestions. One or two Hongkongers, usually former leaders of the territory, serve as deputy national-level CPPCC Vice Chairmen, while there are 124 seats for "specially invited" Hongkongers on the broader 2,172-person CPPCC National Committee.

The **Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and Overseas Chinese Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (HKMTOCC)** is a ministerial-level special committee that is responsible for liaising with target groups to promote party policies, investigate important issues and make policy suggestions related to these groups, and organize political activities for relevant members of the CPPCC.

China has significant economic interests in Hong Kong and is trying to incorporate the territory into its overall national development planning, most notably through the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) plan, announced in the government work report of March 2017 and outlined by the Central Committee and the State Council in February 2019. The plan is to transform Hong Kong, Macao, and nine nearby cities in Guangdong Province into a more integrated metropolis through intercity infrastructure connectivity, commercial exchange, and policy coordination. The party's **Leading Group for Building the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (CLGGBA)** was founded in 2018 includes the Executive Vice Premier as the Director; the Party Secretary of Guangdong and a Vice Premier as Deputy Directors; and the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Chief Executive of Macao, Director of the HKLO, Director of the Macao Liaison Office, and Executive Deputy Director of the CHKMWO as ordinary members. The institutional driver of the GBA project is the NDRC, which houses the administrative office of the GBALG.

Most of the day-to-day business of governing Hong Kong is done by pro-Beijing Hongkongers in the **Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKG)**, which was established after the 1997 handover and theoretically has jurisdiction over the territory's domestic affairs. The head of government is a Chief Executive who is elected by a 1,500-member Election Committee—which is formed by elections held within 40 official special interest groups known as functional constituencies—and then appointed by the Premier of the State Council in Beijing. The Chief Executive nominates 21 "principal officials" to serve as Chief Secretary for Administration, Financial Secretary, Justice Secretary, their three deputies, and heads of other policy bureaus in the HKG, who are then appointed by the State Council. The Chief Executive presides over a consultative cabinet known as the Executive Council (ExCo), which meets weekly and includes all 21 principal officials plus 16 nonofficial members who effectively serve as ministers without portfolio. The legislature is the unicameral Legislative Council (LegCo), which consists of 90 members elected from geographical, functional, and Election Committee constituencies. Virtually all LegCo members now belong to the pro-Beijing camp, which includes several different political parties, the largest of which is currently the conservative Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB).

The Chief Executive chairs the Committee for Safeguarding National Security of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (CSNS), a group of senior local officials created under the Hong

Kong National Security Law to lead the analysis, legislating, and protection of national security in the territory. The committee has extraordinary powers that are not subject to legal review, including approving prosecutions under the Hong Kong National Security Law and determining the eligibility of candidates for elections. Vetting of election candidates is conducted by the new National Security Department of the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPFNSD). The mainland official serving as HKLO Director exerts a high level of influence over the CSNS by serving as its National Security Adviser.

Beijing governs **Macao** with a similar set of institutions, notably the **Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macao Special Administrative Region (MLO)**. Macao is a former colony of Portugal that Lisbon transferred to Chinese sovereignty in 1999. Macao is located just over 60 kilometers across the Zhujiang River Estuary from central Hong Kong, but it is much smaller in both land area (approximately 30 square kilometers versus 1,110 square kilometers) and population (about 690,000 versus 7.33 million). It is the only Chinese territory where gambling is legal, making it a mecca for tourists from the mainland and across the region.

### *Xinjiang and Tibet*

Xinjiang and Tibet are both classified as autonomous regions rather than provinces of the People's Republic of China because of their large ethnic minority populations. According to the 2020 national census, the ethnic composition of Xinjiang's 25.9 million people is approximately 45.0 percent Uyghur, 42.2 percent Han, and 12.8 percent other ethnic groups (mostly Kazakhs and Hui). Among Tibet's 3.65 million people, 86.0 percent are Tibetan, 12.2 percent are Han, and 1.8 percent are other ethnic minorities. Among China's national population, 91.1 percent of people are Han and 8.9 percent are from one of 55 official ethnic minorities. There are significant differences in religious practices between the Han ethnic majority and Uyghurs and Tibetans. Uyghurs are a Turkic ethnic group for whom Islam is the dominant religion, while Tibetans are an East Asian ethnic group who practice Tibetan Buddhism.

The history of resistance to ethnic and religious repression in Xinjiang and Tibet, as well as the strategic and economic significance of these areas, means that both regions receive special attention at the highest level of national politics, in the Politburo and its PSC. For example, the Politburo discussed economic development and political security in Xinjiang at its monthly meeting in May 2014 and the same issues in Tibet at its monthly meeting in July 2015. The CPPCC Chairman, who is usually the number-four national leader on the PSC, leads both the **Central Coordination Group for Xinjiang Work (CCGXW)** and the **Central Coordination Group for Tibet Work (CCGTW)**. These party bodies bring together the central party-state's study, coordination, and decision-making on issues in Xinjiang and Tibet, respectively.

In addition to their involvement in with Hong Kong, the CPPCC and the UFWD are heavily involved in the party's policymaking on ethnic minority populations, especially in Xinjiang and Tibet. The UFWD oversees mobilizing ethnic minority populations to support party leadership; it does the same with religious leaders and believers, with an overall aim to ensure that ethnic and religious minorities assimilate into mainstream Chinese society. The UFWD Second Bureau is responsible for general work with ethnic minorities, with the Seventh Bureau focused on Tibet and the Eighth Bureau on Xinjiang, while the Eleventh Bureau and Twelfth Bureau both focus on religion.

The ministerial-level **CPPCC Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee** conducts political consultations and supervises policy proposals related to Tibet and Xinjiang, while the National Committee has 101 ethnic minority representatives and 69 representatives of religions, of which many are Tibetans and Uyghurs. In China's legislature, the ministerial-level **NPC Ethnic Affairs Committee** studies, deliberates, proposes, and drafts legislation and regulations related to ethnic minorities.

The National Ethnic Affairs Commission (NEAC) is responsible for managing policies toward ethnic minorities, official research on ethnology, ethnic minority culture and education, economic development in ethnic minority areas, carrying out foreign propaganda work related to ethnic minorities, and supervising Beijing's system of autonomous regions for ethnic minority populations. It is a ministerial-level constituent department of the State Council but was formally placed under the direct administrative leadership of the UFWD in the sweeping party-state institutional reforms of 2018, reflecting Xi's desire to exercise greater political and social control over ethnic minority populations. The general offices of both the CCGXW and CCGTW are located within the NEAC.

The National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) manages China's five government-sanctioned religious organizations: the Buddhist Association of China, the Catholic Patriotic Association, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, and the protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement. It oversees the appointment of religious leaders, the interpretation of religious texts, and the promotion of religious practice in accordance with party policy. The NRAA is the agency responsible for selecting the reincarnations of Buddhist leaders and for suppressing underground churches. It was formerly a deputy ministerial-level bureau directly under the State Council, but it was absorbed by the UFWD in the party-state reorganization of 2018, reflecting Xi's desire to strengthen political control over religious activity and suppress potential threats to the party's authority from rising religious faith in the country.

Provincial-level authorities are responsible for applying central directives in their jurisdiction, which involves adapting general instructions to local conditions, formulating local implementation regulations, and disbursing official funds to realize these policy goals. Both Xinjiang and Tibet are governed by a **Regional Party Committee** and a **Regional People's Government**, which replicate

the structure of the central authorities in Beijing, with the party leading the formulation of policies that are sent to the government to implement. The number-one regional official is the Party Secretary, and the number-two official is the Governor (or Chairman) of the People's Government, who usually serves as a Deputy Secretary of the Regional Party Committee. Both leaders are ministerial-level officials, while members of the Regional Party Committee hold deputy ministerial rank.

Xinjiang and Tibet are not provinces but rather autonomous regions. This means that their People's Governments and People's Congresses nominally enjoy some autonomy to govern and regulate ethnic issues, Beijing provides a larger budget for ethnic policies, and the main minority language is an official language of the region. The Governor of an autonomous region must belong to the dominant ethnic minority, so the Governor of Xinjiang is always Uyghur, and the Governor of Tibet is always Tibetan. The party also makes special efforts to recruit minority cadres. However, autonomy applies only to government organs and not to the more powerful Regional Party Committee, which remains under strict control of the CCP leadership, meaning the regions have no ability to act outside the party's wishes.

The PLA also operates a special deputy theater-level Tibet Military District and Xinjiang Military District, which report not only to their regional PLA Western Theater Command but also to the headquarters of the PLA Ground Force in Beijing. These districts reflect the heightened levels of security that Beijing believes are required to suppress political violence and strengthen border defenses in these areas. The Xinjiang district also has an army-level Southern Xinjiang Military District, which covers the Uyghur cultural heartland and is headquartered in the historic Uyghur city of Kashgar.

Xinjiang has a unique layer of governance: the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). The XPCC is a paramilitary organization that operates a regional business empire under its alter ego, the China New Construction Group Corporation. It is a ministerial-level body under the State Council, but it also answers to the Xinjiang regional authorities. It is led by a Primary Political Commissar, who is usually the regional Party Secretary; a full-time Political Commissar and Party Secretary, usually a ministerial-level official; and a Commander, usually at the deputy ministerial level. The XPCC has outposts around Xinjiang and directly manages the party, government, military, and enterprise governance of several county-level cities, mostly associated with XPCC agricultural projects, particularly cotton farms. Its workforce is predominately Han, and it is a significant facilitator of Han migration into Xinjiang. The United States has sanctioned the XPCC for its alleged role in mass internment and forced labor.

## People

### *Hong Kong*

**Xi Jinping** (born June 1953) is the most important decision maker in Chinese policies toward Hong Kong. Xi also has a special interest in Hong Kong affairs after having served as Director of the former Central Coordination Group on Hong Kong and Macao Affairs from 2007 to 2012.

**Ding Xuexiang** (September 1962) is the Executive Vice Premier and likely Director of both the Central Leading Group on Hong Kong and Macao Affairs and the Leading Group for Building the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Ding, who is a close Xi ally and the party's number-six leader on the PSC, is intimately familiar with Xi's thinking on Hong Kong affairs, having served in the CCP General Office for the past decade and as Xi's chief of staff for the past five years. He accompanied Xi on his visits to Hong Kong for the handover anniversary celebrations in 2017 and 2022. Ding has no specialist background in Hong Kong affairs and is likely to channel Xi's views in his new roles.

**Xia Baolong** (December 1952) is Director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, which will become the Central Hong Kong and Macao Work Office later this year, and Deputy Director of the CLGHKMA. Xia, who will turn 71 in 2023, is likely to retire, especially as he has stepped down from his role as a CPPCC Vice Chairman since 2018. That CPPCC role accorded him deputy national rank and allowed him to serve in the ministerial-level position beyond the normal retirement age. Xi tapped Xia to replace Zhang Xiaoming at SCHKMAO in February 2020, following Zhang's demotion to Executive Deputy Director after months of protests in Hong Kong against Beijing's rising political influence. He also serves as Deputy Director of the Central Leading Group on Hong Kong and Macao Affairs. Xia is a career local official who worked under Xi and with several Xi allies in Zhejiang during the 2000s and 2010s. His lack of experience in Hong Kong affairs demonstrates Xi's emphasis on political loyalty to Beijing over any conciliation with demands for more autonomy by the local population. Xia is under US sanctions for his role in the National Security Law.

**Zheng Yanxiong** (August 1963) is Director of the Hong Kong Liaison Office. He was promoted to the role in January 2023 after serving as Director of Beijing's Office for Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong since July 2020. He spent the previous two decades rising through the local government ranks in Guangdong Province, including several years in Shanwei City, just up the coast from Hong Kong, where he worked under Wang Yang, Hu Chunhua, and on the provincial party standing committee with Xi ally Li Xi. While Zheng may be a trusted enforcer and implementer, he is both geographically and politically far from Beijing's policymaking, and he is not even on the party's 20th Central Committee. Zheng replaced Luo Huining, a Xi ally who worked



closely under Zhao Leji in Qinghai in the mid-2000s, the first HKLO Director with no work experience in Hong Kong affairs. Luo was parachuted into Hong Kong in January 2020 to replace Wang Zhimin after his dismissal for mishandling the protests and local elections.

**Dong Jingwei** (November 1963) is Director of the Chinese government's Office for Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong. He is a veteran of the security services, having worked for over a decade as head of the national security department of Hebei Province and then as a Deputy Minister of State Security with responsibility for counter-espionage work. **Cui Jianchun** (July 1964) is the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Commissioner in Hong Kong. He began his career as an accountant and manager at the state-owned China National Nuclear Corporation before passing the open selection process for senior diplomats in 2011 and later serving as China's ambassador to Kuwait, Guyana, and then Nigeria. Peng Jingtang, a major general who once served as Chief of Staff at the Xinjiang headquarters of the People's Armed Police, is Commander of the PLA Garrison in Hong Kong.

**John Lee (also known as Lee Ka-chiu)** (December 1957) was selected as Chief Executive of Hong Kong by the Beijing-controlled Election Committee in May 2022. As the only mainland-approved contender, he became the sole candidate and received 99.4 percent of the vote. Lee rose through the ranks of the Hong Kong Police Force from 1977 to 2012, before becoming Undersecretary for Security in 2012 and then Secretary for Security in 2017. In the last position, Lee played a leading role in the Hong Kong government's crackdown against the pro-democracy movement and in the implementation of Beijing's National Security Law. Lee's favor in Beijing was confirmed when former Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam appointed him Chief Secretary for Administration—the second-highest public office in Hong Kong—in June 2021. Lee is the first Chief Executive who is not a business executive or a career bureaucrat, and his lack of deep ties to Hong Kong's traditional political elite means that he is an especially loyal servant of Beijing and leans heavily on the People's Republic of China Liaison Office for advice and support. Lee says that one of his top priorities is to enact Hong Kong's own domestic version of Beijing's National Security Law, as required by Article 23 of the Basic Law; this law would echo Beijing's version but would also cover treason and state secrets. It would further erode political liberties and is likely to increase scrutiny of foreign individuals, firms, and nongovernmental organizations with connections to Hong Kong politics. Still, the direct impact would be modest relative to the political earthquake of 2019–2020.

**Leung Chun-ying (also known as C. Y. Leung)** (August 1954) has been a Vice Chairman of the CPPCC since 2017 and is the highest-ranking Hongkonger in Beijing's system of political consultation and United Front work. He served one term as Hong Kong Chief Executive from 2012 to 2017. Leung's staunchly pro-Beijing politics saw him defend unpopular constitutional and educational reforms proposed by the National People's Congress (NPC), contributing to the Umbrella Revolution, during which hundreds of thousands of people participated in protests, and

the Occupy Central sit-ins that overtook Hong Kong's downtown in late 2014. Amid further civil unrest, and facing a bribery accusation, Leung declined to run for a second term. In his current position, he has been a vocal critic of the 2019 protest movement and an advocate for the National Security Law.

**Liu Cigui** (September 1955) is Director of the CPPCC Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and Overseas Chinese Committee. He led the CPPCC Foreign Affairs Committee from 2020 to 2023 but has no specific experience working on Hong Kong. He was previously Party Secretary of Hainan, and before that spent most of his career in Fujian, where he worked as a deputy to Xi confidant He Lifeng in Xiamen in the mid-2000s, as well as under Xi's overall leadership of the province. Liu left the Central Committee last year because of his age, but his political connections likely explain why he remains in the central government.

**Shen Chunyao** (May 1960) is Director of the NPCSC Committee on the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. He also directs the equivalent committee for Macao and serves as a Deputy Director of the powerful NPC Constitution and Law Committee. Shen is a legal specialist with a background in international law who has worked in the NPC for the last two decades and has led the legislature's work on Hong Kong and Macao since 2018. He played an important technical role in drafting the National Security Law and in 2022 was promoted from an alternate member of the 19th Central Committee to a full member of the 20th Central Committee.

### *Xinjiang and Tibet*

**Wang Huning** (October 1955) is Chairman of the CPPCC, the fourth-ranked leader on the PSC, and the likely Director of both the Central Coordination Group for Xinjiang Work and the Central Coordination Group for Tibet Work. Wang was a leading political scientist who served as a top policy adviser to Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and then Xi, for whom he was a key architect of "Xi Jinping Thought." Wang's role suggests a more ideological approach to United Front work in Xi's third term, continuing to push for closer political alignment of ethnic and religious minorities with the central leadership. Human rights and minority rights will remain contentious issues between China and the West.

**Shi Taifeng** (September 1956) is Director of the CCP United Front Work Department, a CPPCC Vice Chairman, and a member of both the Politburo and the CCP Central Secretariat. Shi is the first incoming Politburo member to be assigned the UFWD directorship since 1977, representing an elevation in the status and importance of United Front work under Xi. This move suggests that Xi will redouble the party's efforts to mobilize ethnic and religious minorities to support party leadership, although using techniques of persuasion and co-optation as much as violence and repression. Shi is a legal scholar who is connected to Xi through the Central Party School, where he

served as a Vice President while Xi was President from 2002 to 2007. He was later put on the fast track to higher office by promotions to provincial government, serving as Governor of Jiangsu and Party Secretary of Ningxia and then Inner Mongolia, both autonomous regions with significant ethnic minority populations.

**Pan Yue** (April 1960) is the ministerial-level Director of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission and a UFWD Deputy Director, as well as a member of the 20th CCP Central Committee. He is only the third member of the Han ethnic majority to lead the NEAC, after his predecessor Chen Xiaojiang (2020–2022) and inaugural leader Li Weihai (1949–1954), suggesting that Xi does not trust minority cadres to implement more assimilationist policies. Pan has had an eclectic career, working in party media, state-owned enterprise management, and the environment ministry. Although he is an award-winning poet, Pan's speeches suggest that he is a true believer in Xi's hardline ethnic policies and will champion them within the political system.

**Chen Ruifeng** (May 1966) is Director of the National Religious Affairs Administration and a UFWD Deputy Director, and last year he won alternate membership in the Central Committee. His professional background is in the party's central propaganda bureaucracy, but he served on the provincial party committees of Hubei and Qinghai before winning his current role in March 2023. He is likely to also serve as Head of the General Office of the Central Coordination Group for Tibet Work, but this has not been publicly confirmed. His non-specialist background reinforces the essentially political nature of ethnic affairs work under Xi.

**Lin Rui** (August 1967) is Head of the General Office of the Central Coordination Group for Xinjiang Work and a UFWD Deputy Director. Previously, he was the youngest-ever Deputy Minister of Public Security and Deputy Secretary-General of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission under Xi ally Chen Yixin. Lin rose through the ranks of the Fujian public security office—where he would have been a relatively young cadre during Xi's stint as a provincial leader—and eventually became Deputy Mayor of Xiamen, where he worked closely Pei Jinjia, the Mayor and then Party Secretary, who is an acolyte of He Lifeng. Li's public security background suggests that Beijing is unlikely to soften its political scrutiny of the Uyghur population. Lin also serves as a Deputy Director of the NPC Ethnic Affairs Committee.

Other members of the UFWD leadership include **Chen Xiaojiang** (June 1962), ministerial-level Executive Deputy Director; **Xu Lejiang** (April 1959), ministerial-level Party Secretary of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce; **Chen Xu** (July 1963), ministerial-level Director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office; and **Ma Lihuai** (December 1968).

**Ma Xingrui** (October 1959) is the Party Secretary of Xinjiang and, like every officeholder since 2002, sits on the Politburo, a sign of the importance of the region's geopolitical location, social stability,

and natural resource to the central leadership. Ma was previously Governor of Guangdong, an economic and trade powerhouse. His appointment in September 2021 coincided with a gradual shift away from mass internment of ethnic minorities to employment programs aimed at boosting economic development, although allegations of forced labor make this new phase no less troubling. Indeed, Ma promised no wavering on the region's stability-first policies, saying he would "firmly promote continuous and long-term social stability in Xinjiang and never allow any reversal for the hard-won stability." Ma is an aerospace engineer and spent most of his career as an academic and then as an executive at the state-owned China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation. He is associated with a group of aerospace technocrats that Xi has promoted up the party ranks, seemingly because their institutions have been bright spots in achieving innovation breakthroughs and political discipline.

**Erkin Tuniyaz** (December 1961) is the Governor of Xinjiang. Tuniyaz, like every Governor of the region, is an ethnic Uyghur, but his identity has not influenced his cooperation with Beijing's assimilationist politics. He has spent his career working in local government in his native Xinjiang, mostly working on personnel issues in the regional organization department, and served as Deputy Governor from 2008 to 2021. **Shohrat Zakir** (August 1953), who preceded Tuniyaz as Governor from 2015 to 2021, is the highest-ranking Uyghur in the political system, as he is one of 14 deputy national-level Vice Chairmen of the NPCSC, which usually reserves a spot for both a Uyghur and a Tibetan representative.

**Li Yifei** (January 1964) is the Political Commissar and Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. Li is a local official who spent most of his career in his native Yunnan, a province with a large ethnic minority population but few Uyghurs, before brief stints in Guizhou and now Xinjiang. He was appointed to the Central Committee for the first time in 2022. **Xue Bin** (April 1966) is Commander of the XPCC. He is a registered urban planner who worked in Xinjiang local government since graduating from university in 1987, first as an urban planner and then as a local leader since 2002.

**Wang Junzheng** (May 1963) is Party Secretary of Tibet. He was promoted to the role in September 2021 after almost three years in Xinjiang, where he was Li Yifei's predecessor as XPCC Political Commissar and Party Secretary. Wang's role in Xinjiang at the height of the mass internment raised fears that Beijing wanted to implement the system in Tibet; this has not happened, although there are reports of forced labor programs. Most of his career has been as a local government leader, with previous stints in Yunnan, Hubei (where he worked under Xi loyalist Li Hongzhong), and Jilin. He was elevated to full membership in the 20th Central Committee after serving as an alternate member of the 19th Central Committee.

**Yan Jinhai** (March 1962) is Governor of Tibet. Like all officeholders, he is an ethnic Tibetan, although he is unusual in being only the third governor since 1981 to not come from the Tibet Autonomous Region. Yan hails from the adjacent province of Qinghai, where he spent the first 38 years of his local government career. During that time, he led Tibetan autonomous prefectures in Qinghai under the provincial leadership of Zhao Leji, Xi's ally on the PSC who served as CPPCC Chairman from 2018 to 2023. Yan's predecessor, Che Dalha, whom he replaced in October 2021, is also an ethnic Tibetan, but not from the official region of Tibet. **Losang Jamcan** (July 1957), who served as Governor from 2013 to 2017, is an NPCSC Vice Chairman and therefore the highest-ranking ethnic Tibetan.

**Zhang Yijiong** (October 1955) is Director of the CPPCC Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee. Zhang is a Han official whose ancestry is in Shanghai, but, like Yan Jinhai, he spent most of his career in Qinghai, where he also worked under Zhao Leji. He then worked as Deputy Party Secretary of Tibet, Governor of Jiangxi, and UFWD Executive Deputy Director from 2012 to 2022.

**Bayanqolu** (October 1955) is Director of the NPC Ethnic Affairs Committee. He is an ethnic Mongolian who worked in Inner Mongolia for two decades, then transferred to Zhejiang, where he served on the provincial standing committee while Xi was Party Secretary. He later worked in Jilin, where at different times he held all four provincial-level leadership roles.

## Policy

### *Hong Kong*

Xi's authoritative report to the 20th Party Congress in October 2022 suggested that the "one country, two systems" model for governing Hong Kong and Macao will increasingly resemble "one country, one system." He called for measures to "implement the Party Central Committee's overall power to govern," to ensure that only "patriots rule Hong Kong," and to implement local laws that "safeguard national security." John Lee's first term as Chief Executive will likely see him try to enact a local version of Beijing's National Security Law under Article 23 of Hong Kong's Basic Law, a measure that is likely to further erode political freedoms, rule of law, and the integrity of the civil service.

Xi is undeterred by US sanctions against several Chinese and Hong Kong officials involved in the National Security Law. In his report, he said that the party would "form a broader United Front in support of 'one country, two systems' at home and abroad," suggesting more active efforts under Wang Huning and Shi Taifeng to co-opt and coerce the local and foreign population of Hong Kong to accept and advance Beijing's rule. He also said that the party will "fight against anti-China and

chaotic forces in Hong Kong” and “prevent and curb the intervention of external forces in Hong Kong affairs,” suggesting more belligerence in responding to foreign critiques of Beijing’s policies.

Xi said that Beijing was committed to deepening Hong Kong’s economic and social ties to the mainland, including through Greater Bay Area projects, and to improving Hong Kong’s position in international finance, trade, transport, innovation, and culture. But Xi’s focus on security above rule of law means that Hong Kong’s status as a global finance hub is likely to diminish, although for the foreseeable future, the territory will maintain a significant but narrower role as a capital gateway for China.

Beijing is trying to focus on improving economic development and social services in Hong Kong as important ways to consolidate support for the pro-Beijing establishment. In July 2022, Xi visited Hong Kong to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the handover and told his audience that “what the people of Hong Kong desire most is a better life, a bigger apartment, more business start-up opportunities, better education for kids, and better elderly care.” A priority of Lee’s administration is to address sky-high property prices and extreme economic inequality.

### *Xinjiang and Tibet*

Revelations began to emerge in 2017 that the party was operating extrajudicial detention camps (euphemistically labeled “vocational training centers”) in Xinjiang, where an estimated one to two million people have been held and sometimes tortured based on notional allegations of “extremism.” The party also instituted a labor transfer program that has reportedly displaced hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs, especially in the Uyghur-dominated south, and sent them to undertake forced labor in factories elsewhere in Xinjiang or around China. In response, the United States has issued denunciations and findings of genocide, imposed economic sanctions on several Xinjiang leaders, and banned the import of Xinjiang products presumed to be made with forced labor. China responded by enacting its own reciprocal sanctions on individuals in the United States and several other sanctioning countries.

In the last couple of years, there seem to have been some changes in emphasis, if not any major shifts in policy, regarding Xinjiang. In July 2022, on an inspection tour of Xinjiang, Xi reportedly did not mention the “terrorism, extremism, and separatism” that had motivated the internment program. He also made no references to “vocational training centers” or labor transfer programs. Chen Quanguo, Ma Xingrui’s predecessor as regional Party Secretary, left the position shortly after and went into political limbo for six months before being demoted and left out of the new Politburo. Xi’s report said that “forces of ethnic division, religious extremism, and violent terrorism have been effectively curbed.” Yet, even if Beijing’s tactics have softened somewhat, the strategy of Han supremacy remains the same.

Xi's approach to Xinjiang is emblematic of a seismic shift in the party's attitude toward ethnic minorities, from a "first-generation ethnic policy" that supported a degree of cultural autonomy to a "second-generation ethnic policy" that emphasizes cultural assimilation with the Han majority. At the Third Central Symposium on Xinjiang Work in September 2020, Xi praised the party's work on ethnic affairs in Xinjiang as "perfectly right," demanded that all party members support this work in Xinjiang, and hailed the region's move toward greater development and "long-term peace and stability." He emphasized efforts to heighten a sense of identity with the Chinese nation, especially through the education of young people and local officials. The impetus for this change appears to be a belief among Xi and other party leaders that cultural autonomy was feeding aspirations of political independence and encouraging what they saw as terrorism, such as deadly Han-Uyghur clashes in Urumqi in July 2009, a van attack in Tiananmen Square in October 2013, and a knife massacre in Kunming Train Station in March 2014. Still, only a tiny number of extremists pursued violence, and they never seriously threatened Beijing's rule.

### *Tibet*

Tibet has not seen the same social unrest or internment policies as Xinjiang in recent years and has become somewhat less of a focus of international human rights activism. The CCP's last major policy statement on Tibet came at the Seventh Central Symposium on Tibet Work in August 2020. Xi vowed then to build a "new modern socialist Tibet that is united, prosperous, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful," facilitated by patriotic education reforms to "plant the seeds of loving China deep in the heart of every youth." Xi also stirred controversy with his call for the party to "actively guide Tibetan Buddhism to adapt to the socialist society and promote the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism."

Xi's signature emphasis on the "Sinicization" of religion represents an effort to reform or mold the belief systems and doctrines of China's permitted religious faiths into compliance with socialist values and party leadership. As early as 2015, he called for the Sinicization of five religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. Xi appears to view the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism as linked to his calls for opposing "splittism" and building "an impregnable fortress" of stability in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Tibetan autonomous areas in Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, and Qinghai. The next major flashpoint between Beijing and Tibet will likely be the selection of the next Dalai Lama, as the party will conduct its own process that will clash with that of Tibetan Buddhist authorities in India. There is no way to know when this will happen, but the current Dalai Lama turns 88 in 2023.