

# UNDER WATCH

Reporting In China's  
Surveillance State



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## FCCC 2018 REPORT ON MEDIA FREEDOMS IN CHINA

Rapidly expanding surveillance and widespread government interference against reporting in the country's far northwestern region of Xinjiang drove a significant deterioration in the work environment for foreign journalists in China in 2018. This is shown by the annual survey of correspondent members conducted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC).

Survey results painted the darkest picture of reporting conditions inside China in recent memory. Moreover, the responses suggested authorities used surveillance in an attempt to silence sources within China and outside its borders. For the first time in three years, a foreign correspondent was effectively expelled through visa denial. Separately, Chinese authorities also issued severely shortened visas and reporting credentials, one for just 2.5 months, to at least five correspondents -- from the New York Times, the BBC, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sankei Shimbun and Voice of America -- and the FCCC is concerned that such measures are being used to punish reporting. (Typically, journalist credentials are issued for a year.) Pressure on Chinese national news assistants and sources intensified. Fifty five percent of respondents said they believed conditions deteriorated in 2018 — the largest proportion since 2011, when foreign media coverage of pro-democracy protests prompted an extensive government backlash. Not a single correspondent said conditions improved last year.

"On a day-to-day basis, it's worse now than it has been in the past 20 years, with episodic exceptions like the [2011] Jasmine Revolution," a bureau chief at a U.S. news organization said. "In the past, there were crackdowns, but you knew the reasons and expected them to end. What we're dealing with now is a new normal."

### KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

- 55% of respondents said reporting conditions have deteriorated
- 91% were concerned about the security of their phones
- 66% worried about surveillance inside homes and offices
- 48% were followed, or were aware that a hotel room was entered without permission
- 24 out of 27 of respondents who traveled to Xinjiang said they experienced interference while there

More than half of respondents said surveillance -- both human and digital -- negatively affected their reporting in 2018. Furthermore, Chinese authorities have told many journalists that reporting is prohibited or restricted in certain areas that the government considers sensitive, such as the Xinjiang region, despite official Chinese regulations allowing journalists to travel anywhere within the country except for the Tibet Autonomous Region.

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout the report, we cite percentages as a proportion of those who answered the question, as not all surveyed journalists answered all questions. In addition, where total responses are low we cite the number of total responses.

Surveillance and other forms of obstruction were prevalent in Xinjiang, where the mass detention and political “re-education” of as many as one million persons from Muslim minorities has attracted global attention. Many of the journalists who travelled there were visibly followed, physically blocked from areas and pressured to delete the contents of their reporting materials. Some were even denied hotel rooms.

Authorities have more routinely and directly threatened to expel journalists by declining to renew their credentials, the survey showed. In 2018, the Chinese government issued visas with shortened terms to a small, but expanding number of correspondents, in apparent retaliation against news coverage that upset the government. It was also the first year the FCCC was made aware of multiple correspondents receiving three-month visas. Among them is a New York Times correspondent who has been given a press card with three-month validity that was issued six weeks after the application was submitted in late 2018. This further elevates the FCCC’s concern that Chinese authorities are using such measures punitively.

“It’s harassment,” said Bill Ide, bureau chief for Voice of America, whose reporter Yibing Feng was given a six-month visa instead of the usual one-year term. “They’re trying to send a message, but it’s unclear really what the message is, because we have asked them repeatedly to tell us specifically what led to the shortened visa and they have not given us any clarity.”

Sources have been subjected to mounting government pressure. Interviews with bureau chiefs also revealed authorities are increasing pressure on Chinese citizens who work with foreign news organizations, a trend that is of particular concern to the FCCC.

“The overall climate continues to deteriorate to the point where we are really worried about the safety of contacts and Chinese-national researchers,” said Tom Mitchell, Beijing bureau chief at the Financial Times. “It’s by far the worst I’ve seen working as a journalist in China or Hong Kong since 2000.”

The FCCC is pleased to see some areas of improvement. Fewer respondents said they were called to meetings with the Ministry of State Security and there were fewer reports of Chinese diplomats exerting pressure on media outlets’ home headquarters. New visas were processed smoothly at the Public Security Bureau.

However, trends suggested that the government is instead becoming more nuanced in how it controls foreign media coverage, rather than becoming more open to journalists.

“What correspondents in China experienced in 2018 shows that authorities are becoming more sophisticated in their use of surveillance. The wider monitoring and pressure on sources stop journalists even before they can reach the news site,” said FCCC president Hanna Sahlberg. “There is a risk that even foreign media will shy away from stories that are perceived as too troublesome, or costly, to tell in China. These trends run contrary to the FCCC’s hopes for real openness for foreign media to be able to cover China.”

Sahlberg said recent reports of Chinese authorities offering, on behalf of Malaysia, to conduct intense surveillance of Hong Kong-based foreign correspondents was a disturbing development that violated both Hong Kong law and international standards.

“While 2018 has seen state-supported Chinese media expanding and widening its scope abroad, the room for reporting inside the country shrinks,” Sahlberg said. “The restrictions now facing foreign correspondents call for a serious look at the commitments China’s government has as the 2022 Winter Olympic host. We want to see an even playing field.”

## SURVEY METHODS

This report is based on a survey of journalists who belong to the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China in Beijing. Conducted in December 2018, 109 of 204 correspondent members representing media from 31 countries and regions responded to the survey.

Percentages reflect the proportion of responses to a specific question. Not all respondents answered every question. Bureau chiefs at nine news gathering organizations headquartered in North America, Europe and Asia contributed extensive interviews for this report.

For data citations, please credit the the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC), a Beijing-based professional association comprising more than 200 correspondents from over 30 countries and regions.

## DETAILED SURVEY RESULTS: WORKING CONDITIONS

### GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE

#### KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

- Nearly half of correspondents directly experienced human surveillance
- 22% of respondents said they were aware of authorities having tracked them using public surveillance systems
- 50% of respondents said surveillance impacted their reporting

China's use of surveillance over journalists and their sources has grown in scope and in sophistication. Nearly half of correspondents directly experienced human surveillance, for example being followed or having their hotel room entered.

*Hotel rooms repeatedly entered for 'cleaning' despite do not disturb signs and requests to manager while covering government events.*

- Journalist from US media

But the state can also surveil massively at a distance, for example through intercepting online communication and camera tracking. Surveillance also creeps into journalists' private lives.

*I have witnessed files been moved in my laptop, also in my phone I have actually seen them in my Gmail opening and closing files. This instance was at 2 a.m. in the morning. I had a very high level of surveillance in my home and office, on phone, all communications apps: Wechat, Gmail, ABC email, malware in my phone, etc.*

- Matthew Carney, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

*On two separate occasions, my phone call was interrupted and I heard a recording of my call being played back down the line to me instead of the person I was talking to. This happened once with a colleague and once with my 8 year old son, which was highly distressing.*

- Kathy Long, British Broadcasting Corporation

**Multiple phone calls were cut off while discussing politically sensitive topics.**

- Josh Chin, Wall Street Journal

**It was clear in Xinjiang that I was tracked on the road using license plate monitoring.**

- Nathan VanderKlippe, Globe and Mail

**Police officers told me they knew about a social event I was organising that I had privately invited friends to using WeChat.**

- Yuan Yang, Financial Times

**WeChat messages sometimes mysteriously disappeared from my phone while sharing politically sensitive information with my colleagues via a group chat.**

- Tomoyuki Tachikawa, Kyodo News

The expanding scope of surveillance means journalists have been subject to intimidation in their personal lives, and made unable to contact sources or even report at all in some regions.

**We (a TV crew of three) traveled to Wen'an, Hebei for a story on plastic recycling. Within about half an hour, a local official along with a couple of bao'an [security officers] and several other men in plainclothes drove up and met us. The official told us they'd been looking all over the small town for us and realized where we were because of the surveillance cameras... They escorted us to the border of the county to ensure we left.**

- Bill Birtles, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

**Most of my trips to the field revolve completely around how to get as much as we can before we are likely stopped or detained, with a lot of strategizing about easier, less sensitive stories that could be done first so as not to come back completely empty-handed. On a trip to Ningxia, I aborted a story entirely out of fear that I had been compromised and would get anyone I subsequently interacted with in trouble.**

- Becky Davis, Agence France-Presse

**In Xinjiang, in a lot of situations, I didn't even try to conduct an interview, because we didn't want to bring people in danger. And when every corner is monitored you do bring your sources in danger.**

- Axel Dorloff, ARD German Radio

**Electronically, I've come into the office several times while dealing with a sensitive story and my computer hasn't started up at all. One of my reporters had computer issues while covering the trial of a human-rights lawyer. As a security measure, we recently decided to reimage every computer in the bureau.**

- Bureau chief of a U.S. news organization

## INTENSIFIED INTERFERENCE IN XINJIANG AND OTHER AREAS

The survey found that authorities have used extensive means to monitor and frustrate reporting in Xinjiang where a growing network of political re-education centers for ethnic minority groups attracted global media attention in 2018. In Kashgar, for example, Sankei Shimbun bureau chief Kinya Fujimoto was rejected from three hotels that normally accepted foreign guests. "This was the first time I was denied a hotel room," he said. He ended up staying in a karaoke bar until police came and directly escorted him to accommodation in a hotel chosen by the police.

In the past, the FCCC asked correspondents about their experiences reporting in areas that Chinese authorities deemed sensitive. The FCCC this year added a series of questions that focused specifically on reporting in Xinjiang. Twenty-six respondents in this section said they took at least one reporting trip to the Xinjiang region. Of those, all but three reported experiencing interference while there and 24 registered specific forms of interference.

### Of correspondents who described the interference:

- 23 (96%) were visibly followed
- 19 (79%) were asked or forced to delete data
- 15 (63%) had interviews visibly monitored
- 14 (58%) were detained or had a colleague detained
- 14 (58%) were physically blocked from access to public areas
- 10 had interviews disrupted
- 7 were denied a hotel room
- 3 had equipment confiscated or damaged
- 2 had evidence of a hotel room entered without permission

*I was followed and tracked for nearly 1,600 kilometres, by at least 9 cars and 20 people -- most of whom refused to identify themselves or their organizations. I was also threatened with arrest, and had armed police approach my vehicle with shields raised and tell me to put my hands outside the car. I was detained numerous times. A police officer seized my camera and deleted pictures without my consent.*

- Nathan VanderKlippe, *Globe and Mail*

*Reporting obstructions in Xinjiang have been significant since the 2009 riots in Urumqi but the past couple of years have been particularly vexing and excessive.*

- Former bureau chief of a U.S.-based news outlet

*[We were] detained and told the weather was too windy to continue on a highway that hundreds of other vehicles continued to drive on.*

- Employee of a Western news organization

*We were detained in police office for several hours after filming outside a suspected detention camp in a Xinjiang city. We were also prevented from freely recording interviews with locals in two different cities -- officials intervened either by interrupting the interview and telling us to stop or by telling interviewees not to talk to us. We were followed everywhere, often by multiple cars -- unmarked and official police vehicles.*

*Ten armed police officers visited my hotel room at midnight demanding to know what my plans were during my visit and insisting that I give them a copy of my itinerary and planned interviews. Requests for official explanations were ignored. One particularly farcical intervention was when a plainclothed police officer who had been following us around Kashgar for three days pretended to be a plain-clothed member of the public who was upset about being filmed by me.*

*He -- via various propaganda officials -- insisted on having the material deleted, which I eventually agreed to as a courtesy. This was used as an excuse to view other pictures I had recorded and insist on them also being deleted.*

*- Correspondent with a Europe-based broadcaster*

*On two trips to Xinjiang, my colleagues and I were followed by at least one car everywhere we went. When we arrived at certain locations, the minders would multiply and expand to include plainclothes police, uniformed police, and officers in riot gear in addition to local propaganda department staffers.*

*They physically blocked us from going further and said we could not take photos or video, then insisted on looking through our footage and deleting anything they deemed unacceptable. Sometimes a "concerned citizen" would appear on the scene to tell us that s/he had seen us taking a photo of them or their workplace, and then demanded that we delete it in the name of their privacy, even if it was a photo that did not have any people inside it.*

*In Kashgar, we booked rooms at two different hotels, received the booking confirmations, only to be told after we arrived and showed our passports that the rooms were full or that a large party had suddenly appeared at the hotel and needed rooms. When pressed, one hotel manager sheepishly admitted that he'd just received a call from authorities asking him to deny us lodging.*

*When we had finally checked into the hotel that we were assigned, police and propaganda workers showed up at the lobby to "welcome" us to the region. The next morning, we saw one of the police officers dressed in a hotel staff uniform and standing behind the front desk. He was visibly embarrassed when we recognized him.*

*- Journalist with a Western news organization*

Pressure on some correspondents continued after they left Xinjiang. A quarter of respondents faced inquiries from authorities after leaving the region, with five summoned to meetings at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and two receiving questions through their headquarters.

*Multiple inquiries. Tone measured, but message very clear: They object to our reporting.*

*- Reporter with a Europe-based broadcaster*

*Our bureau chief was summoned to a meeting with [the Foreign Ministry] after we put questions to them before publication. They put forward the government line about policies in Xinjiang but did not make any explicit threats against publication.*

*- Reporter at a Western news agency*

Chinese regulations do not require foreign correspondents to obtain prior permission for travel to any part of the country outside the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Nevertheless, correspondents are frequently told by police and local officials that reporting is restricted or prohibited when they go to areas the authorities deem sensitive.

- Of 28 who tried to report from Xinjiang, 26 (93%) were told that reporting was restricted or prohibited.
- Of 27 who tried to report from the North Korean border region, 15 (56%) experienced such problems
- Of six who tried to report from Inner Mongolia, four (67%) experienced such problems
- Of four tried to report from Tibetan-inhabited areas outside the TAR, two (50%) experienced such problems
- All 12 who tried to report from industrial districts, such as steel-producing areas, who experienced such problems
- None of the three who tried to report from the south-east Asia border region experienced such problems

*We attempted to report a lighthearted story about a ski resort, but were told that foreigners were not allowed to enter the area, even though it's a tourist attraction and neither the owner or any other information indicated it was off-limits. The region was a Hui Muslim county in Qinghai very close to a military base.*

- Becky Davis, AFP

*On the North Korean border, we were prevented from filming anywhere where we could clearly see North Korean settlements on the opposite border. Despite Chinese tourists taking pictures and filming on the same stretch of road, the propaganda officials who had been following us all morning told us we were not permitted to film there and demanded that we erase our material. We were also followed, told to leave, and visited late at night in our hotel room by propaganda officials demanding to know our itinerary. Even when we were filming in the local Chinese towns, people were told not to talk to us by our minders.*

- Correspondent with a Europe-based broadcaster

*Nowadays [interference occurs] almost everywhere. Especially in the provinces where they don't have much experience with foreigners and media.*

- Marieke De Vries, East Asia correspondent for NOS

*I was explicitly told reporting on Xinjiang or Tibet was off limits.*

- Reporter for U.K. media

## THREATS AGAINST CHINESE SOURCES AND ASSISTANTS

Chinese employees at foreign media organizations, including news assistants, were also subject to harassment and intimidation. Such interference continues to be routine, and the regularity of incidents is alarming.



## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

- 37% of 91 respondents said their Chinese colleagues were pressured, harassed or intimidated in 2018

In some instances, news assistants were forcibly separated from their foreign correspondent colleagues as well as kidnapped, detained, and questioned by the authorities. In these interactions, the authorities sometimes denounced Chinese colleagues as working for “the other side.” The intimidation at times extended to the family members and personal associates of Chinese colleagues.

***My Chinese news assistants were routinely told by security personnel that they are traitors working for the foreign press and advised them to consider the consequences. They were told they are unpatriotic and should consider their future.***

- Matthew Carney, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

***During a reporting trip to Yining, Xinjiang province, our minders lost track of us after we took a back-door exit from a night bazaar. We went out onto the streets and interviewed people. When we returned to the hotel, state police were waiting for us. They called our assistant downstairs and requested that she go without us (I and another correspondent were on the trip with her). We joined her downstairs, which appeared to infuriate the state police. They started yelling at her that “she is Chinese” and we are foreigners. When we insisted that we wanted to be in the room with her when she was interrogated, they threatened to take her away. We relented, and they took her inside a room near the hotel lobby (which had a glass door, so we could see from the outside), and the four of them - three men and a woman - yelled at her for about half an hour. They made her promise she would report to them about anything we were planning to do next in that city.***

- Correspondent for German media

***My Chinese colleague was kidnapped in Jinan and held in another car by plainclothes for about 6 hours. His parents at his hometown were visited by local security personnel with pressure. His former college teachers and schoolmates called him asking about his work, etc.***

- Yibing Feng, Voice of America

The deteriorating environment for journalism extended as well to sources, as authorities sought to intimidate those who provided information critical to understanding China.

- 34% of respondents said sources had been harassed, detained or called in for questioning at least once

Harassment of sources even occurred outside of China for interviewees based abroad. In a number of instances, authorities were able to determine, through both digital and physical surveillance, who correspondents were interacting with and later questioned sources about the nature of the exchanges.

Such harassment occurred both during and after the interviews. Persistent harassment make it more challenging for correspondents to do their work. In some cases, sources contacted journalists after being questioned by the authorities to retract what they had said, or to ask photos and video not be published and broadcast.

***The authorities tracked us through my phone and figured out who I was with. Later the officials questioned that person.***

*- Reporter at US news organization*

***In a coverage trip to central China, it was clear interviewees we spoke with were being contacted and questioned by authorities after our interaction with them. While it is unclear what form of questioning they had experienced, the interviewees had called us back to ask that footage or photographs be deleted, or otherwise rescind their comments.***

*- Journalist at a Western news organization*

***Every taxi driver and almost every other person I interacted with in Xinjiang was questioned afterwards on the spot. As far as I could see, in many cases their personal data were recorded.***

*- Correspondent for German media*

***Chinese interviewees overseas were contacted by the Chinese Embassy after my report went out. One interviewee subsequently asked for my article to be withdrawn.***

*- Journalist from a Western news organization*

***While I was on a reporting trip in central China, several interviewees whom I visited in person were harassed and questioned by authorities later that same day or the next. In response to police intimidation, one source ended up telling authorities that s/he was not aware that we were journalists during our conversation with him/her— this was not true, but when the authorities later detained me and two colleagues, they used this to allege that we had broken the rule that we should show our press cards prior to conducting an interview.***

*- Journalist from a Western news organization*

Over the last year, several bureau chiefs of major foreign news outlets grew more wary of involving Chinese researchers on a wider range of stories deemed to be “sensitive” by the government, such as stories about Marxist students.

One bureau chief at an American news organization said there were at least three serious incidents last year of state security harassing Chinese news assistants. In one case, someone on LinkedIn offered an assistant cash for insider information about the news organization.

“During the fall, one researcher was being called in weekly,” said the bureau chief of a U.S. news organization. Authorities “also started targeting Chinese support staff who do not work in news gathering. This is the first time any of them have reported being taken to tea.” Researchers were asked about general reporting activities and also about specific stories, in particular, Xinjiang.

In one instance in Xinjiang, a Chinese assistant was questioned and yelled at for half an hour, the bureau chief of a European media organization said. “It makes our work impossible, and it’s so far, for me, the most serious event of pressure on news assistants. And that is for me reason enough to stop an endeavor like that in the middle or not even do it in the future. I really have to think about it again if we could do it in the future.”

Concerns about safety risks to Chinese sources also grew, and difficulties with interviewing academics increased.

"I never really thought I would have to not contact people because of fear they'd be picked up [by police]." said Tom Mitchell, Beijing bureau chief at the Financial Times. "That's a dramatic change in the last five years.

"It has been more difficult to speak with experts, even for topics that the government wouldn't normally deem sensitive such as Xi Jinping's visit to the Philippines or Shinzo Abe's visit to Beijing, said a senior editor at a Western news organization. "People used to be happy to speak, comment, for instance on foreign affairs in front of the camera, and now they don't even want to speak on the phone."

Another Western media editor agreed, saying, "Clearly, there seems to be a growing fear between Chinese academics to talk to foreign press, even to issue positive comments about the system."

## DE FACTO EXPULSION, VISA HARASSMENT AND VISA DELAYS

In the spring of 2018 BuzzFeed News bureau chief Megha Rajagopalan was effectively expelled from China following her groundbreaking coverage of the widespread incarceration of Muslims in Xinjiang's political re-education centers. After reporting in China for six years, Rajagopalan was unable to renew her visa and forced to leave, despite previously being told by the authorities there would be no problems. She received no explanation as to why her visa was denied.

Another journalist, ABC correspondent Matthew Carney, received a visa of 2.5 months which was essentially a non-renewal, leading to his departure. "Officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were explicit in saying they were not happy with my reporting in Xinjiang and on the leadership," said Carney.

While the annual visa renewal process went smoothly for the vast majority of correspondents -- 81 percent -- Chinese authorities continued to implicitly and explicitly threaten non-renewal of visas.

***We were told about the possibility of non-renewal as a result of my reporting.***

*- U.K. media*

***I was told by the Foreign Ministry if Chinese public opinion swung too heavily against me due to my reporting that there was "nothing they could do to save me (from being kicked out).***

*- European media*

About half of foreign journalists were called into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for interviews prior to receiving their renewed press credentials and one out of ten respondents said they had problems during the renewal process.

***The tone was angry, confrontational, and threatening. They came with transcripts of my reports and went through them. They told me they could not guarantee any visa renewal as my reporting was biased and dishonest and I had upset "senior" people. I had two meetings like this; each one lasted about an hour.***

*- Matthew Carney, Australian Broadcasting Corporation*

*I met for 90 minutes with senior officials at the International Press Center. They had a dossier filled with my reporting with an analytical cover sheet that included translated headlines of all recent articles and some sort of pie chart that appeared to be related to those articles. It was an unpleasant meeting that focussed on Xinjiang reporting. My press card was eventually issued at the last possible moment -- with perhaps an hour to spare -- to allow me to return home for a family event.*

*- Western reporter*

*The officer told me they were interested in positive coverage of China. At one point he said that as China was developing, the nation needed encouragement, not criticism, so it would be best if much of my coverage was positive and only sometimes negative, a balance that would be "acceptable" to the Chinese people. Later, I was told flat out at the PSB that if I created some trouble, or broke local laws and regulations (which can be loosely defined), I would have trouble with my visa.*

*- U.K. media*

Six correspondents said their visa renewal difficulties were related to their news coverage, and at least four journalists were issued short three-month or six-month visas. Sankei Shimbun bureau chief Kinya Fujimoto received two consecutive three-month visas, unusual treatment for the bureau chief of a major international media organization. 2018 was the first year the FCCC is aware of multiple correspondents receiving presumably punitive three-month visas.

*Several months after I was granted a three-month visa a Foreign Ministry official told me I was being "watched". Local authorities in Zhejiang contacted an African source about an interview I did about his business and two friends told me they had either been contacted by national security personnel or had someone fishy inquiring about me. Immigration officials at the PSB didn't know why I had a series of three-month visas and suggested there had been a misunderstanding. My year-long press card was restored the following year.*

*- U.S. reporter*

Lengthy visa delays were an issue for half of newly-arriving journalists. In some cases, authorities told news organizations the delays were a consequence of reporting that they didn't like.

One news organization received two visas in 2018 after delays of 12 and six months, and as of early January 2019, the organization was still waiting for processing of a third visa application that was submitted 12 months before.

At a U.S. news organisation, one reporter received a visa for six months while a second reporter has been waiting more than a year for accreditation, due to government complaints about news articles.

A senior editor at another Western media outlet said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had to "go higher up" to make a decision, "the first time I heard we have issues with the visa application." Only 3 of the 21 new 2018 visa recipients received their visa ahead of the start date of their assignment. Half of the 21 correspondents said approval was not given within three months after the intended start of the assignment in China.

***The Chinese Embassy in Paris “recommended” for more than four months that we not apply for a visa as our news reports about China spying on the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa had made us “unpopular.” We got the visa seven months after we first tried to apply. In the meantime, the French Embassy in Beijing blocked several visas for Chinese journalists.***

*- French media*

***I only received a three month visa, the first known such case for Japanese media. The explanation I got from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was: “It’s our right, we decide.”***

*- Kinya Fujimoto, Sankei Shimbun bureau chief*

One-third of correspondents said the requirement to forfeit passports to authorities for the ten-day visa renewal period caused disruptions in their reporting, as well as in administrative work, such as banking.

One-tenth of respondents said they were unable to report on tsunamis, earthquakes, and elections in the Asia-Pacific region because their passport was being held by immigration authorities. In one case, a parent was prevented from taking a seriously ill child abroad for medical treatment.

## YEAR IN REVIEW: 2018 NOTABLE INCIDENTS

In 2018, correspondents reported numerous incidents of harassment, violence, and interference by authorities. In February, New York Times journalist Steven Lee Myers was reporting from Dzongsar Monastery, when he and a photographer were escorted to a police station and detained for nearly 17 hours. They were barred from using their phones, told they should have asked prior permission to report, and registered with police — and, eventually, escorted to the nearest airport.

In March, a photographer with an American news outlet experienced harassment while photographing a motorcade near the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse. A middle-aged man in workout clothes, glasses, and a facemask stuck his hand in front of the photographer’s lens, then grabbed the camera, and tried to pull it away. Two other men in street clothes (one also wearing a face mask) then joined in, grabbing at the photographer’s arms, leaving scratch marks and contusions, before identifying themselves as police — although without showing identification.

That same month, a Western video journalist travelled to Shijiazhuang with a Chinese news assistant for interviews at a textile factory. After interviewing the factory chairman, the mood turned as the journalist began getting close-up shots of the factory’s products. A staff member approached and pretended to admire the journalist’s camera – while clearly trying to figure out how to delete footage. The journalist was then accused of lying about media affiliation, and staff threatened to call police if the journalist did not erase images, which the journalist eventually did.

Also in March, Radio France Internationale correspondent Heike Schmidt was doing radio interviews near Raffles City shopping mall in Beijing, when a large number of police and security agents arrived. They asked if Schmidt had interviewed people in the street, if the questions concerned constitutional reform, and for which media Schmidt was working. They eventually seized a tape recorder, listened to the interviews, and ordered that they be deleted. One police officer threatened: “At the end of the year, you will see me again for the visa application.” Another said Schmidt had “to ask permission to the street committee before doing interviews in public space.”

In March as well, Le Monde bureau chief Brice Pedroletti was followed by State Security many times during a reporting trip to Tibetan Aba prefecture. Local government officials followed him and sat in on an interview. They proposed “help” and “assistance.” Even though Pedroletti clearly told them he did not want any help, they continued to follow.

Also that month, a member of the U.S. media went to Yiwu for a story about China’s aid to fragile states. Four days after interviewing a Sudanese shipping company owner, the owner contacted the reporter to say he had received a phone call from immigration police. The authorities wanted him to visit their office that afternoon to talk about the interview. It was the first time this reporter had been made aware that a non-PRC national had been contacted following an interview.

In April, a reporter with Agence France-Presse rushed to Tianjin to attend the trial of Politburo member Sun Zhengcai. The reporter approached the courtroom entrance, getting quickly surrounded by over twenty plainclothes men and a few women. Without identifying themselves as police, they took aggressive stances and shouted at her to ask what she was doing and show identification. One plainclothes man stepped in front of her on the sidewalk to block her from walking and pushed her back with both his hands. They held her on the sidewalk for over twenty minutes, before saying the trial was over. Several plainclothes followed her down the street until she reached the subway station.

Also that month, a member of the Western media was followed for three days by propaganda officials in Ordos, Inner Mongolia. At one point, two officials showed up when the reporter went to a housing project; they knocked on all apartment doors until they found the reporter talking to a local resident in his home. At least one official tried to get in the reporter’s taxi cab. Later, a group of local officials insisted on standing next to the reporter during interviews. When asked why, they said it was due to sensitivities about ethnic minorities in the region, even though the reporter wasn’t writing about the issue.

In May, a journalist from a Western news outlet was on vacation with two foreign citizen, non-journalist friends when they were stopped and told to produce identification in Tumen, near the North Korean border. Alarm was raised over the journalist’s visa. About twenty minutes later, two jeeps carrying about a dozen police and city officials drove up to their location and began to question each member of the group, demanding to go through their photos — then deleting many of them. The group was then driven to a lunch spot, kept under watch as they ate and eventually told to go home. They were kept under surveillance as they bought train tickets and, later, discovered a man walking out of their hotel room, who appeared to be a plainclothes officer. The man stayed at a room that night on the same floor.

Also in May, Reuters correspondent Sue-Lin Wong was stopped while reporting at China’s border with North Korea. A local government official showed a document stating that “without approval, foreigners are not permitted to enter areas out of bounds to foreigners.” Pressed for details, the officer said: “It’s an internal document which you’re not allowed to see.” Later, Chinese border control staff called in at Wong’s hotel, preventing her from continuing her trip along the border at three separate roadblocks around Tumen.

The same month, AFP journalist Ben Dooley was prevented from completing his reporting on a pig that became a national icon after surviving the Sichuan earthquake 10 years prior. As Dooley tried to chat with visitors, three plainclothes police officers stopped the interview and began asking questions about plans for covering the earthquake anniversary. Dooley was part of a group of foreign and domestic journalists, who were then escorted out of the museum where the sow is living out her days. The officers, who repeatedly refused to give their names, then followed AFP reporters to the town’s border in an unmarked car.

In May, too, a correspondent went to Luoyang to interview a labor activist for a TV report. Police knocked at the activist's door saying that neighbors had reported a foreign visitor and they needed to check passport and registration. The police took photos of the journalist's passport and journalist press card, asked which hotel the journalist had stayed in and tried to ask a series of questions about the interview. When the journalist left, a man in black sunglasses was sitting outside filming and clumsily pretending not to. The activist later sent a message saying two men in plainclothes had taken position outside his house and that he was followed by them wherever he would go.

In July, a journalist from a Western news outlet went on vacation to Xinjiang with a friend on a tourist visa. They were asked about their plans and followed, including by security agents who stayed in hotel rooms near theirs. At one point, four or five guards armed with batons and riot shields surrounded their car and an officer demanded to see and scan cellphones with a data extraction device. The journalist refused, eventually agreeing to let the agents see photos but not scan a phone. Later, in Urumqi, they noticed a car watching them at a cafe. When the journalist walked towards the car, a man got out and grabbed the journalist, who managed to slip away and make it back into the cafe. About half an hour later, officers arrived and began issuing questions; within another few minutes, another six or seven officers with riot shields and two or three plainclothes Uighur officers came into the cafe, demanding to see pictures. At one point, while the journalist continued to insist they were simply on vacation, an officer jabbed a finger into the journalist's chest and said "You're lying! I think you're trying to threaten national security!" They eventually deleted nearly all the photos not taken at an officially-designated tourist site on the friend's phone. A man then tracked them onto a 20-hour train to Kashgar, where they were then followed by half a dozen men. They tried to check into three or four different hotels but were told that there were no rooms and turned away.

In August, a reporter from Japan's Sankei-Shimbun was denied access by the Chinese foreign ministry to a meeting between Japanese and Chinese officials. No explanation was given for the denial, but such denials are in effect a form of punishment, and has been previously used as such by Chinese government agencies. The Sankei-Shimbun reporter had been selected to attend as part of a reporting pool chosen by the Japanese press corps. Upon the exclusion of Sankei Shimbun, the Japanese press corps declined to proceed with their pool coverage of the meeting, and a Japanese government official was reported to have registered a complaint with the Chinese government with regard to this incident.

In September, a journalist with the Western media was on the first bullet train from Shenzhen to Hong Kong when the journalist came across a group of Chinese state media reporters doorstopping a Chinese official in the meal cart of the train. During a lull in the group interview, the journalist asked what the official's response was to the protests in Hong Kong over the fast train. Several of the official's staffers pushed the journalist away from the group interview, saying the journalist was forbidden from reporting on the train. One staffer said, "you should know the rules of reporting in China. You aren't allowed to ask certain types of questions." Another staffer then followed the journalist around the train for the rest of the trip and kept interrupting interviews with passengers, saying it wasn't permitted to speak to passengers.

In October, Globe and Mail journalist Nathan VanderKlippe was followed and tracked for nearly 1,600 kilometres across Xinjiang in a rental car. At least nine cars and 20 people, nameless and dressed in plain clothes, kept near-constant watch. "They are not following you," one propaganda official assured him. "They are offering you service." Over roughly 80 hours in Xinjiang, he received three police escorts, saw his pictures deleted twice and was threatened with arrest. VanderKlippe was accused of fleeing the scene of an accident and, separately, of breaking highway rules before being informed he had done neither of those things. Once, as he sat typing notes in his car, three police advanced: Two officers held up anti-explosive shields, while a third grasped his gun, ordering him to place both hands outside the window.

Also in October, a journalist with a Western news outlet, along with two colleagues, went on a reporting trip to Xinjiang. Fifteen minutes after arriving at the Hotan airport they were stopped at a checkpoint and officers began following their taxi. When they took pictures and photos of a kindergarten, police surrounded them and forced them to delete their materials. Later that trip, they went to Kashgar, where police also followed them and constantly harassed their taxi drivers with repeated phone calls, often preventing them from driving to their destinations. In Peyzawat County, where they were trying to visit a school, their taxi driver appears to have been ordered to drive them around in circles. The driver eventually took them to their destination, where half a dozen or so officials and officers from various departments stopped them and took turns examining their photos and videos and deleting them.

In November, an American newspaper reporter and a foreign video journalist traveled to Urumqi. They were tailed at all times by at least a half-dozen men in plainclothes driving two cars. At the International Grand Bazaar, they were stopped by local police, who called in a propaganda official to “assist” their reporting. The official told them not to film or photograph the White Mosque, “because they’ve told me in the past they don’t like to be filmed.” On the second day, each time they stopped to film or talk to people, police armed with shotguns would emerge within five minutes and tell them they weren’t allowed to be there. The scrutiny made it impossible to conduct interviews. Later, an official threatened to ban their news organization from further reporting in Xinjiang if they did not delete footage of another mosque, which stood surrounded by rubble.

Also that month, journalist Mathias Boelinger traveled to Aksu, in Xinjiang, to report on the mass internment of Uighurs. He was filming outside a reeducation camp when two guards walked up and said filming was not permitted. They asked Boelinger to follow them inside the compound where he was told to empty his pockets and hand over his camera. One officer ordered him to open his phone, which he refused. After some time, he was seated in the back of a car with a guard next to him, while another guard carried his equipment and the items from his pockets. He was driven to the city’s justice department where about five officials were waiting. They tried to ask about how he had found out about the place and who his “friends in this city” were. They said filming was not allowed if Boelinger did not have the permission of the camp administration, “because filming counts as an interview.” After Boelinger deleted footage in front of them, he was driven to a hotel. From that moment on, he was followed everywhere he went and eventually driven to the airport, where those following him waited at the security check until he passed through.

In December, a reporter for a British newspaper traveled to Ningxia to report on Hui Muslims. The reporter spoke with an imam who later disappeared and re-appeared with two men, later joined by a third, who provided an escort to lunch. They wanted the reporter to ride in their car; the reporter refused. The reporter was told that a security official had asked questions at a hotel; later, the reporter was blocked twice on two separate days (with different drivers/plates/route, after having taken many other precautions to stay under the radar) at police checkpoints from entering a town where protests had taken place a few months prior. Some people at checkpoints were uniformed, and others weren’t; none would give names or produce ID. Reasons ranged from bird/swine flu quarantine, because the reporter was a foreigner, for the reporter’s safety, out-of-town plates. When the reporter tried to go in on foot - which would have made moot the out-of-town plates excuse - plainclothes reinforcements were called in and the reporter was blocked, pushed and grabbed by a human chain of mostly men. At the time, all other cars - regardless of their plates - were able to pass. It grew easy to recognize minders following on foot and by car. The reporter later learned interviewees were visited by plainclothes male officers demanding to know the nature of discussion.

Also in December, a Western news agency travelled to Tianjin with two other colleagues, a photographer and a text colleague. When they arrived across the road from a courthouse at around 8am, half an hour before the trial for Wang Quanzhang was meant to start, plainclothes police, dozen or so troublemakers,



three local news crews - an organization called Fazhi Youxian, which hassled foreign press - preventing them and other foreign media from filming the exteriors of courts, or waiting for supporters or family members who were due to show up to support.

An activist and supporter of Wang showed up and was quickly surrounded by foreign media and many young to middle aged men. There was a lot of subtle shoving and pushing and lots of blocking of cameras. One man pushed himself in front of the reporter's camera, raising an accusation that he had been hurt. The reporter was pulled out of the crowd by plainclothes police, and as that happened the goons rushed in to kick and hit the reporter's abdomen and lower body.

Later, one of the cameramen from the Fazhi Youxian accused one of the reporter's colleagues of pushing him down onto the floor. There was commotion and the police were involved, questioning the colleague and interrogating him. The colleague denied doing such a thing — he even had proof. He had taken a photo of the cameraman's 'colleague' pushing the cameraman down. It was clear that this was a ploy to accuse foreign media of doing something that they hadn't done in order to get journalists who attended into trouble.