

**The New York Times**

## **America Is Handing China a Massive Victory**

**By Bay Fang**

**May 2, 2025**

In February 2020, weeks before Covid-19 paralyzed the world, the Radio Free Asia reporter Jane Tang received a panicked text from a source in Wuhan, China: “They are following me,” the message read. “I’m too scared to move.” Ms. Tang had been investigating China’s cover-up of a new disease that had spread through Wuhan when she learned that Li Zehua, a journalist who had quit his state media job to chase the story, was being trailed by the police. Shortly after Ms. Tang received the message, Mr. Li was arrested.

In contacting RFA, Mr. Li turned to one of the last reliable channels for on-the-ground, uncensored news in China. Since it was established in 1996 by the U.S. government in response to China’s massacre of pro-democracy student protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989, RFA has reported from regions in Asia hostile to independent journalism: China, North Korea and Myanmar, among others, filling an important gap where free press outlets cannot exist.

RFA’s impact has been crucial in China, where the Chinese Communist Party maintains a stranglehold on all media. The party, which leads the world in imprisoning journalists, relentlessly monitors and surveils social media and punishes people for online comments that run afoul of Beijing’s official narrative. Its advanced censorship and surveillance technologies are constantly upgraded to block unsanctioned news from reaching ordinary Chinese people.

Despite the roadblocks and intimidation, a national survey by [Ipsos](#) found that at least 44.1 million users managed to break through China’s Great Firewall weekly to read and listen to RFA’s reports in Mandarin, Cantonese, Uyghur and Tibetan. They seek out RFA to learn the truth about subjects such as natural disasters, mass protests, internal party conflicts and Taiwan’s democracy. The connection goes both ways: Ordinary citizens have provided the invaluable news tips that have fueled RFA’s reporting for almost 30 years.

Yet today, as part of President Trump’s administrative cuts, RFA stands on the brink of extinction. On March 15, RFA’s parent agency, the U.S. Agency for Global Media, notified us that the \$60 million grant that financed our entire operation was canceled and we would no longer receive our congressionally appropriated funds. Since then, RFA has been forced to sever contracts with almost all of our 463 on-the-ground stringers and furlough more than three-quarters of our 391 full-time staff members. Our studios are

empty, and news production is minimal. Entire services in some languages have gone dark. Layoffs are imminent.

While the United States divests from providing free, uncensored press in China, the Chinese government continues to ramp up its global disinformation operation. China pours billions of dollars annually into a global media influence campaign that includes a radio program in some 50 languages, and its China Global Television Network operates in more than 70 countries. Beyond its official transmissions and websites, Beijing gives away content to media outlets throughout Africa, the Pacific region and Southeast Asia, and reportedly pays non-Chinese influencers to gush about subjects like tourism in Xinjiang, home to the repressed Uyghur minority.

Celebrating RFA's imminent demise on Weibo, a popular Chinese social media platform, a former editor in chief of the Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece Global Times wrote, "Such great news." By letting RFA go totally dark at this crucial moment, the U.S. government would cede the information space to China, playing into the hands of President Xi Jinping.

RFA's survival is central to U.S. interests. The recently published [Annual Threat Assessment](#) from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence leaves little doubt that the Trump administration considers China the central menace to U.S. security. The report warns of Chinese operations weaponizing fake online profiles and artificial-intelligence-generated news anchors to "suppress critical views and critics of China within the United States and worldwide, and sow doubts in U.S. leadership and strength."

RFA's on-the-ground journalism has brought the world's attention to some of the Chinese Communist Party's most inconvenient truths. When the Hong Kong government forced the independent news providers Apple Daily and Stand News to fold in 2021, RFA stood its ground as the last major independent Cantonese media outlet. We continued to operate in Hong Kong until threats to our journalists forced us to close our bureau last year.

When China opened a secret police station in New York in 2022, RFA's investigative reporters [exposed](#) that it was but a small part of a growing network of party stations around the globe. And when the Chinese government started rounding up Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in 2017, RFA's small team of Uyghur reporters in Washington exposed [mass detentions](#) in Xinjiang that eventually ensnared more than a million people. Our reporting was picked up by news outlets around the world and led the [United States](#) to declare that the Chinese Communist Party was committing genocide against its Uyghur citizens. In retaliation for RFA's coverage, we estimate that Chinese authorities have jailed at least 50 of our Uyghur journalists' family members.

The sacrifices that RFA reporters make knowing they're the last line of defense for their countrymen are often unimaginable. They cut family ties to minimize the harassment of their loved ones. They have been jailed, tortured and exiled. Now these brave journalists, who have risked everything to speak truth to dictators abroad, may be silenced by the very nation whose belief in press freedom inspired them in the first place.

The irony is as stark as it is cruel, and that is why we continue to fight for RFA's survival, bringing our case to the courts. Last week the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ordered the U.S. government to release our funds. The order has since been appealed, and we have yet to receive any additional funds. If RFA is silenced, the official narratives espoused by dictators and despots may go unchecked and unchallenged. The next time a brave source calls or texts, there will be no one left to pick up the phone.

*Ms. Fang is the president and chief executive of Radio Free Asia.*