

# International Day of the Disappeared

## A look at China's use of Enforced Disappearances

### What are enforced disappearances?

An Enforced Disappearance is when a state, or agents acting on its behalf, detains an individual at a secret location, denies them the right to legal counsel and holds them incommunicado. The person simply vanishes. The Communist Party of China (CCP) has legalized two systems to achieve enforced disappearance: Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location (RSDL) and Liuzhi. Both systems permit the authorities to disappear people for up to half a year. Victims of both systems are at a significantly higher risk of forced confessions and torture.

#### Crimes against humanity

Disappearances that are systematic or widespread are defined as crimes against humanity by the Rome Statute. Under this definition, the CCP's systems of enforced disappearance qualify as crimes against humanity.

### RSDL

**Residential surveillance at a Designated Location** or RSDL is employed by the police as an alternative to arrest. It is frequently used against lawyers, journalists, and human rights activists. In RSDL, the victim is kept incommunicado at a secret facility and in solitary confinement. Its current form was codified into law in 2013 and has expanded significantly in use since then. The UN has said its use is tantamount to enforced disappearance. Safeguard Defenders conservatively estimates that between 2013 and 2022 about 65,000 people have been locked up in RSDL.

### Liuzhi

**Liuzhi**, which means retention in custody, is not part of China's criminal justice system. It is run by a non-judicial, non-law enforcement body. Operationally, it mirrors the RSDL system, run by a private CCP police force at secret facilities. Its targets are both Party members and state workers, although anyone connected to an investigation can be targeted. There is little data publicly available on the use of Liuzhi, but what little data there is indicates that it too has expanded in scope. Safeguard Defenders conservatively estimates that from 2018 to 2022 about 67,000 people have been locked up in Liuzhi.

In addition to these two codified systems, the CCP has a myriad of non-codified methods to disappear people. These include the mass re-education camps in Xinjiang, using fake names for detainees in detention centres so they are effectively disappeared, involuntary commitment at psychiatric hospitals without medical grounds, prolonged incommunicado house arrest for rights activists, and police taking people upon their release from prison into unofficial custody for weeks, months, and sometimes longer.

### Examples of victims



**Gao Zhisheng**  
Human rights lawyer



**Chen Jieren**  
Journalist



**Michael Kovrig**  
Former Canadian diplomat



**Jack Ma**  
Business mogul



**Cheng Lei**  
Australian journalist



**Peng Shuai**  
Tennis player

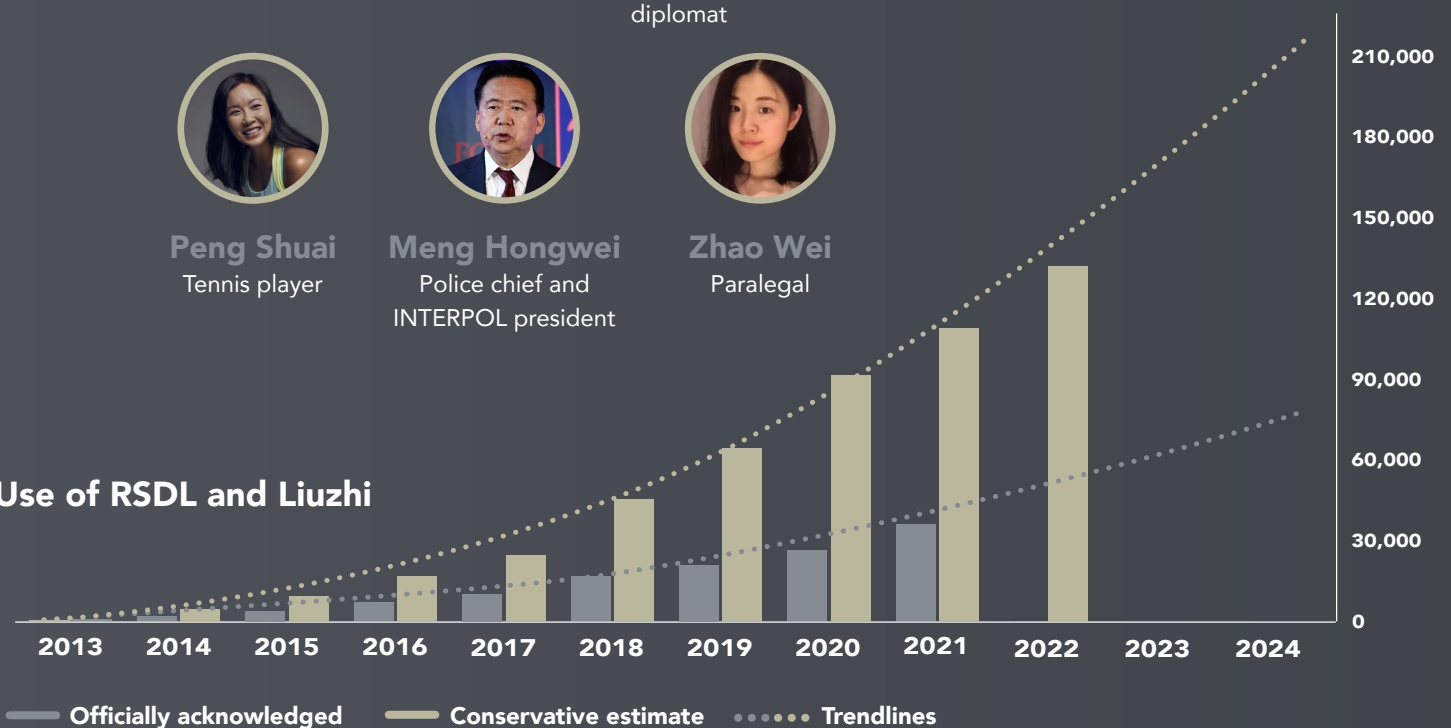


**Meng Hongwei**  
Police chief and INTERPOL president



**Zhao Wei**  
Paralegal

### Use of RSDL and Liuzhi



For details, [read this](#).