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China

Hui Xu & Sean Wu
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Brief overview of the law and enforcement regime

China's anti-corruption laws have been stringent for many years. On 1 January 1980, the *Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China* (the "**PRC Criminal Law**") containing the criminal offences of bribery and corruption came into effect, and later underwent a significant shift in 1997 with enhanced provisions on bribery and corruption offences. Further amendments to the *PRC Criminal Law* were enacted in 2015 and 2020 to update bribery and corruption provisions, respectively.

The enforcement of anti-corruption laws has become increasingly vigorous in recent years, particularly following President Xi Jinping's commitment to curbing and eliminating corruption since coming to power in 2013. This commitment triggered the beginning of a new era, which gave champions an enhanced focus on and appreciation for the strength and breadth of Chinese anti-corruption laws.

President Xi's continued commitment to fighting corruption has reached even the highest echelons of power. According to statistics in a March 2023 report by the Procurator-General of the Supreme People's Procuratorate (the "**SPP**"), Zhang Jun, to the National People's Congress, about 78,000 persons were charged for corruption or dereliction of duty in 2022, including 104 former state functionaries at the provincial/ministerial level,¹ which is indicative of the severity of the government's anti-corruption campaign. In total, the State Supervisory Committee of the People's Republic of China (the "**State Supervisory Committee**") and local supervisory agencies transferred 88,000 state functionaries to the SPP or different levels of procuratorates for prosecution in connection with corruption or dereliction of duty in 2022.² The SPP and the State Supervisory Committee jointly implemented the "*Investigation into the Acceptance and Giving of Bribes on the Same Level*", and prosecuted about 14,000 persons for "bribe-giving" offences in 2022, a figure which significantly increased by 420.64% compared to when the "*Opinions on Further Promoting Investigation into the Acceptance and Giving of Bribes on the Same Level*"; see details below) was enacted.³ According to the statistics in another March 2023 report made by the Chief Justice of the Supreme People's Court (the "**SPC**"), Zhou Qiang, to the National People's Congress, around 139,000 persons were sentenced for corruption or dereliction of duty in 2022, and about 13,000 individuals were sentenced for offering bribes in 2022.⁴

The State Supervisory Committee, which was established in March 2018 according to the *Supervision Law of the People's Republic of China* (the "**PRC State Supervision Law**"), has taken a leading role in honouring China's commitment to anti-corruption enforcement. In addition, to further ensure and reinforce the functions of the State Supervisory Committee, the *Law of the People's Republic of China on State Supervisors* (the "**PRC State Supervisors Law**") was adopted on 20 August 2021 and took effect on 1 January 2022 to regulate the

selection and oversee the administration of officials in State Supervisory Committee and local supervisory agencies. On 20 September 2021, the State Supervisory Committee published the *Implementation Rules of the Supervision Law of the People's Republic of China* (the “**Implementation Rules of the State Supervision Law**”) to provide concrete rules to implement the *PRC State Supervision Law*. In a press release in June 2021, the Deputy Director of the State Supervisory Committee noted that from December 2012 to May 2021, different levels of discipline inspection committees and supervisory agencies of China had investigated 392 state functionaries at or above the provincial/ministerial level, 22,000 state functionaries at the bureau level, and more than 170,000 state functionaries at the county level.⁵ According to a January 2022 report issued by the Standing Committee of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Chinese Communist Party, local discipline inspection committees and supervisory agencies throughout China investigated approximately 631,000 cases in 2021 in connection with bribery and corruption, among which 627,000 officials were disciplined, including 59,000 officials from state-owned companies, 12,000 officials from institutions and state-owned enterprises in the financial sector, and 64,000 officials from governmental or judicial agencies.⁶ According to a January 2023 report published by the State Supervisory Committee, local discipline inspection committees and supervisory agencies throughout China investigated approximately 596,000 cases in 2022 in connection with bribery and corruption, among which 592,000 officials were disciplined, including 53 state functionaries at or above the provincial/ministerial level.⁷

A State Supervisory Committee publication released in June 2021 noted that, between 2014 and June 2020, the PRC authorities successfully sought the extradition of 8,663 people suspected of committing corruption-related offences from more than 120 countries and regions, and recovered criminal proceeds of RMB 21.5 billion (USD 3.29 billion).⁸ In 2022, PRC authorities sought 840 fugitives and recovered criminal proceeds of RMB 6.55 billion (USD 0.9 billion).⁹ Notably, after the formation of the State Supervisory Committee, more than half of the suspects were brought back to China and more than half of the criminal proceeds were recovered.¹⁰

As another example, banquets for representatives of the National People's Congress have given way to self-service and alcohol-free buffets. The issuance of the Administrative Measures on Conferences of Central and State Departments (the “**Measures**”) and the Provisions on Administration of Domestic Official Reception by Party and Government Organs (the “**Provisions**”) in September and December 2013, respectively, echo this development, with the aim of cutting expenditure on central government department officials' meetings. The Provisions contain strict and detailed requirements and standards on where a business meal may take place and what must be excluded from a business meal. These developments are part of President Xi's overall efforts to eliminate opportunities for corruption and extravagance in connection with official meetings and receptions. In addition, as one of the steps of regulating overpriced mooncakes, on 7 June 2022, the National Development and Reform Committee (“**NDRC**”), the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the Ministry of Commerce, and the State Administration for Market Regulation jointly published the *Announcement on Curbing Overpriced Mooncakes and Promoting the Healthy Development of the Industry*,¹¹ providing rules and limitations for boxed mooncakes over RMB 500 per box. According to an NDRC official's comments in a Q&A¹² session, overpriced mooncakes, which not only deviate from traditional Chinese culture but are also considered extravagant and wasteful, impair the morals of society and may even be used as vehicles for corruption.

Notably, the Chinese government proactively attended the annual Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption from 2006 to 2023,¹³ where

it expounded China's continuous implementation of the Convention.¹⁴ This attendance indicated the Chinese government's commitment to its anti-corruption campaign.

Currently, the primary pieces of anti-bribery and anti-corruption legislation in China are: (i) the *PRC Criminal Law*; and (ii) the *PRC Anti-unfair Competition Law* (the "**AUCL**"). The *PRC Criminal Law* applies to both "official bribery" (where government officials and state functionaries are involved) and "commercial bribery" (where private enterprises and/or their staff are involved), whereas the AUCL prohibits "commercial bribery".

In addition to the above primary legislation, various government departments' administrative rules (such as the *Interim Regulations on Prohibiting Commercial Bribery*) and judicial interpretations issued by the SPC and the SPP (such as the *Opinion on Issues concerning the Application of Law in the Handling of Criminal Cases of Commercial Bribery* (the "**2008 Commercial Bribery Opinion**") and, most recently, *Interpretations of Several Issues Concerning the Application of Law in Handling Criminal Cases Related to Graft and Bribery* (the "**2016 Judicial Interpretation**") also contain anti-bribery provisions.

The Communist Party of China (the "**CPC**") and the State Council have also issued internal disciplinary rules governing corruption or bribery of Communist Party members and Chinese government officials.

The PRC Criminal Law

The *PRC Criminal Law* prohibits: (a) "official bribery", which applies to a "state functionary" or an "entity"; and (b) "commercial bribery", which applies to a "non-state functionary".

The term "state functionary" is broadly defined, and includes civil servants who hold office in state organs, persons who perform public duties in state-owned entities or semi-government bodies, persons who are assigned to non-state-owned entities by state organs or state-owned entities to perform public duties, and persons who otherwise perform public duties according to the law.¹⁵ The term "entity" includes state organs, state-owned companies, enterprises, institutions, and people's organisations.¹⁶

The term "non-state functionary" means any person or entity that is not a "state functionary" or an "entity" as defined in the *PRC Criminal Law*. Generally speaking, the criminal sanctions for bribery offences involving state functionaries are more severe than those involving non-state functionaries.

Under the *PRC Criminal Law*, both offering and receiving bribes constitute serious criminal offences in China. The statutory offences are usually categorised as "bribe-giving" or "bribe-accepting" offences and include:

1. offering of a bribe to a state functionary;¹⁷
2. offering of a bribe to a close relative of, or any person close to, a current or former state functionary;¹⁸
3. offering of a bribe to a non-state functionary;¹⁹
4. offering of a bribe to a foreign official or an officer of a public international organisation;²⁰
5. offering of a bribe to an entity;²¹
6. offering of a bribe by an entity;²²
7. introduction of an opportunity to receive a bribe to a state functionary;²³
8. acceptance of a bribe by a state functionary;²⁴
9. acceptance of a bribe by a close relative of, or any person close to, a current or former state functionary;²⁵
10. acceptance of a bribe by a non-state functionary;²⁶ and
11. acceptance of a bribe by an entity.²⁷

The Ninth Amendment to the *PRC Criminal Law* (the "**Ninth Amendment**"), which was promulgated by the National People's Congress on 29 August 2015 and came into effect

on 1 November 2015, focuses on empowering judicial organs to combat corruption more effectively. In addition to introducing a new offence of “offering a bribe to a close relative of, or any person close to, a current or former state functionary”, these amendments:

1. expand the scope of monetary penalties as punishment for bribery offences (see the table below outlining the penalties for various offences, under the heading “Penalties under the *PRC Criminal Law*”);
2. add monetary fines to almost all corruption/bribe-related offences;
3. replace specific monetary thresholds for sentencing considerations with more general standards, such as “relatively large”, “huge”, and “especially huge”; and
4. raise the bar for mitigating circumstances to apply for reduced sentencing.

On 18 April 2016, the SPC and the SPP jointly issued the 2016 Judicial Interpretation on bribery, corruption, and misappropriation of official funds. The 2016 Judicial Interpretation became effective immediately and provides further clarification to the Ninth Amendment regarding corruption and bribery crimes. In principle, the 2016 Judicial Interpretation:

- (i) expands the definition of bribes to include certain intangible benefits;
- (ii) adjusts monetary thresholds for bribery prosecutions and sentencing, including raising the thresholds for bribes involving government officials and non-government officials;
- (iii) clarifies that a thank-you gift after improper benefits are sought still constitutes bribery; and
- (iv) clarifies when leniency may be given and provides additional details on the requirements and benefits of voluntary disclosure.

On 26 December 2020, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress passed the Eleventh Amendments of the *PRC Criminal Law* (the “**Eleventh Amendment**”). The Eleventh Amendment revised the penalties for the crime of accepting bribes by non-state functionaries.²⁸ These amendments:

1. increase the maximum imprisonment term from 15 years to life;
2. replace two-tier penalties in the previous version with three tiers supplemented by aggravating factors; and
3. change the monetary penalty from optional confiscation of property to mandatory criminal fines.

The Eleventh Amendment aims to standardise the penalties for the crime of accepting bribes by non-state functionaries and those for the crime of accepting bribes by state functionaries (except the death penalty), reflecting the goals of the *PRC Criminal Law* to equally protect state and private property.

On 29 April 2022, the SPP and the Ministry of Public Security jointly issued the revised *Regulations of the Supreme People’s Procuratorate and the Ministry of Public Security on the Criteria for Docketing and Prosecuting Criminal Cases under the Jurisdiction of Public Security Bureaus (II)*²⁹ (the “**2022 Prosecution Standards**”), which took effect on 15 May 2022. The 2022 Prosecution Standards provide prosecuting thresholds for certain bribery offences (see below), which appear different from some of the thresholds provided in the 2016 Judicial Interpretation. According to the explanations in a news release³⁰ and a Q&A session³¹ by the SPP and the Ministry of Public Security, the new prosecuting thresholds are prepared in accordance with a future judicial interpretation being drafted by the SPC and the SPP. The 2022 Prosecution Standards provide the following prosecuting thresholds:

1. the docketing and prosecuting threshold for accepting bribes by a non-state functionary is RMB 30,000;³²
2. the docketing and prosecuting threshold for offering bribes to non-state functionaries by individuals is RMB 30,000, and the docketing and prosecuting threshold for offering bribes to non-state functionaries by entities is RMB 200,000;³³ and

3. the docketing and prosecuting threshold for offering bribes to a functionary of a foreign country or an official of an international public organisation by individuals is RMB 30,000, and the docketing and prosecuting threshold of the offences made by entities is RMB 200,000.³⁴

Jurisdiction of the PRC courts

Foreigners or foreign entities are subject to the same legislation when doing business in China.³⁵ Chinese criminal laws apply to crimes that take place within the territory of China, whether committed by Chinese nationals or foreigners.

Accordingly, the PRC courts would have jurisdiction over:

1. bribery and other crimes that are committed by PRC or foreign individuals or entities within China;
2. bribery and other crimes that are committed by PRC or foreign individuals or entities on board PRC ships or PRC aircraft;
3. bribery and other crimes that are committed outside China with the intention of obtaining improper benefits within China;
4. bribery by PRC individuals of foreign officials or officers of a public international organisation outside China;
5. bribery and other crimes committed by PRC nationals outside China that are punishable under the *PRC Criminal Law* by a fixed-term imprisonment of three years or longer; and
6. bribery and other crimes committed outside China by PRC state functionaries or military personnel.

Monetary thresholds for enforcement

As mentioned above, the Ninth Amendment replaced the then-existing monetary thresholds for commencing an investigation into offences with more general standards such as “relatively large”, “huge”, and “especially huge”. The 2016 Judicial Interpretation and the 2022 Prosecution Standards re-establish the monetary thresholds and standards for bribery-related prosecution and sentencing.

Penalties under the PRC Criminal Law

Criminal penalties vary depending on whether the party offering or accepting a bribe is an individual or an entity and, if the party is an individual, whether he is a state functionary or non-state functionary. As explained above, the criminal sanctions for bribery offences involving state functionaries are generally more severe than those involving non-state functionaries.

If the individual has received more than one bribe, the amount of each bribe will be aggregated for the purpose of determining the appropriate penalty.

“Bribe-giving” offences

The *PRC Criminal Law* generally prohibits an individual or entity from giving “money or property” to a state functionary, a close relative of, or any person close to, a current or former state functionary, a non-state functionary or an entity for the purpose of obtaining “improper benefits”.

Previously, “money or property” included cash and in-kind objects, as well as various “proprietary interests that can be measured by money”, such as the provision of: home decoration; club membership; stored-value cards; travel expenses; shares in, or dividends or profits from a company without corresponding investments in the company; payment through gambling; and payment for services that have not been provided, etc.³⁶

The 2016 Judicial Interpretation reaffirms the definition of bribes to include certain intangible benefits. It defines “money and property” to include money, in-kind objects and proprietary interests for the crime of bribery, and “proprietary interests” to include material benefits that can be converted into money, such as home renovation, debt relief, etc., and other benefits that need to be paid using money, such as membership service, travel, etc.³⁷ Previously, the 2008 Commercial Bribery Opinion provided that the amount of such intangible benefits should be calculated on the amount actually paid, whereas the 2016 Judicial Interpretation states that the amount concerned can also be calculated on the amount payable. This calculation is designed to address situations in which services, travel, or other intangible benefits may have been deliberately undervalued by bribe-givers.

In “bribe-giving” cases, a violation occurs when a party pays a bribe with the intent to seek “improper benefits”, which include: (a) seeking benefits from a state functionary, non-state functionary or entity which would be a breach of law, regulations, administrative rules, or policies for that state functionary, non-state functionary or entity to provide; or (b) requesting a state functionary, non-state functionary or entity to breach the law, regulations, administrative rules or policies to provide assistance or facilitating conditions. For commercial activities related to bidding and government procurement, giving money or property to a relevant state functionary in violation of the principle of fairness to secure a competitive advantage is considered as giving money or property for the purpose of obtaining an “improper benefit”.³⁸ Further, if “money or property” has been offered with an intent to seek “improper benefits” but the offence of giving a bribe is not consummated because of factors independent of the said intent, such action may nevertheless constitute a criminal attempt offence under PRC law.³⁹

A person who gives money or property to a state functionary due to pressure or solicitation from that state functionary, but who receives no improper benefit, shall not be regarded as having committed the crime of offering a bribe.⁴⁰

As interpreted by the SPP and the SPC, bribery may be distinguished from a gift by reference to the following factors:⁴¹

1. the circumstances giving rise to the transaction, such as the relationship between the parties, the history of their relationship, and the degree of their interaction;
2. the value of the property involved in the transaction;
3. the reasons, timing, and method of the transaction, and whether the party giving money or property has made any specific request for favour; and
4. whether the party receiving money or property has taken advantage of his/her/its position to obtain any benefit for the party giving money or property.

In other words, a person who gives money or property to a state functionary, non-state functionary or entity without requesting any specific favour may not be regarded as offering a bribe.

Effective from 1 May 2011, China extended the scope of commercial bribery to include illicit payments to foreign officials. The *PRC Criminal Law* now also criminalises the “giving of money or property to any foreign official or officer of a public international organisation” for the purpose of seeking “improper commercial benefits”.⁴² The inclusion of foreign officials in the definition extends the reach of China’s anti-corruption laws beyond the country’s borders, although the distinction between “improper commercial benefits” and “improper benefits” means that the scope of punishable actions involving foreign officials is slightly narrower than those where personnel of Chinese entities, as defined in the *PRC Criminal Law*, are the recipients of bribes.

The table below sets out the monetary thresholds and factors taken into consideration, and the corresponding penalties for the relevant “bribe-giving” offences under the legislation.

“Bribe-giving” Offences			
Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors	Penalty
Natural person offering a bribe to a state functionary	RMB 30,000, or RMB 10,000 if it has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁴³	If the total bribes are between RMB 30,000 and RMB 1,000,000, ⁴⁴ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 10,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁴⁵	Criminal detention, or up to five years’ imprisonment, and monetary penalties
		If the total bribes/the amount of state economic losses caused range between RMB 1,000,000 and RMB 5,000,000, ⁴⁶ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 500,000 and the offender also has one of the five aggravating factors specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁴⁷	Five to 10 years’ imprisonment and monetary penalties
		If the total bribes/the amount of state economic losses caused exceed RMB 5,000,000, ⁴⁸ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 2,500,000 and the offender also has one of the five aggravating factors specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁴⁹	10 years’ to life imprisonment, in combination with monetary penalties, or confiscation of property
		If the offender confesses their own bribery offence before prosecution ⁵⁰	A punishment may be lessened from the stipulated range, or a lighter punishment within the stipulated range may be imposed
		If the offender, who confesses their own bribery offence before prosecution, commits a relatively minor offence, has played a critical role in detecting major cases, or has provided major meritorious services ⁵¹	A punishment may be lessened from the stipulated range, or entirely exempted
Entity offering a bribe to a state functionary	RMB 200,000, or RMB 100,000 if it has an aggravating factor specified in Article 3 of the SPP Opinions on Prosecution Thresholds of Bribe-giving Offences (the “SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards”) ⁵²	In respect of such entity	Imposition of a fine
		In respect of employees in such entity who are directly in charge of the matter in question and the employees who are directly responsible for the crime (collectively, “ Responsible Personnel ”) ⁵³	Criminal detention or up to five years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties

“Bribe-giving” Offences			
Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors	Penalty
Natural person offering a bribe to a close relative of, or any person close to, a current or former state functionary	RMB 30,000, or RMB 10,000 if it has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁵⁴	If the total bribes are between RMB 30,000 and RMB 1,000,000, ⁵⁵ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 10,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁵⁶	Criminal detention, or up to three years’ imprisonment, and monetary penalties
		If the total bribes/the amount of state economic losses caused range between RMB 1,000,000 and RMB 5,000,000, ⁵⁷ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 500,000 and the offender also has one of the five aggravating factors specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁵⁸	Three to seven years’ imprisonment, and monetary penalties
		If the total bribes/the amount of state economic losses caused exceed RMB 5,000,000, ⁵⁹ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 2,500,000 and the offender also has one of the five aggravating factors specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁶⁰	Seven to 10 years’ imprisonment, and monetary penalties
Entity offering a bribe to a close relative of, or any person close to, a current or former state functionary	RMB 200,000 ⁶¹	In respect of such entity	Imposition of a fine
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel ⁶²	Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties
Natural person offering a bribe to a non-state functionary	<i>Prosecuting Threshold:</i> RMB 30,000 ⁶³	If the offender bribes an employee of a company, enterprise, or other entity for the purpose of obtaining improper benefits, the case should be criminally docketed and prosecuted ⁶⁴	
	<i>Criminalisation Threshold:</i> RMB 60,000, or RMB 20,000 if it has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁶⁵	If the total bribes are between RMB 60,000 and RMB 2,000,000, ⁶⁶ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 20,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁶⁷	Criminal detention, or up to three years’ imprisonment, and monetary penalties
		If the total bribes exceed RMB 2,000,000, ⁶⁸ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 1,000,000 and the offender also has one of the five aggravating factors specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁶⁹	Three to 10 years’ imprisonment and monetary penalties
		If the offender confesses own bribery offence before prosecution ⁷⁰	A punishment will be lessened from the stipulated range, or entirely exempted

“Bribe-giving” Offences				
Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors	Penalty	
Entity offering a bribe to a non-state functionary	RMB 200,000 ⁷¹	In respect of such entity	Imposition of a fine	
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel	If the total bribes are between RMB 60,000 and RMB 2,000,000, ⁷² or if the total bribes exceed RMB 20,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁷³	Criminal detention, or up to three years’ imprisonment, and monetary penalties
			If the total bribes exceed RMB 2,000,000, ⁷⁴ or if the total bribes range exceed RMB 1,000,000 and the offender also has one of the five aggravating factors specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁷⁵	Three to 10 years’ imprisonment and monetary penalties
		If the offender confesses their own bribery offence before prosecution ⁷⁶	A punishment may be lessened from the stipulated range, or entirely exempted	
Natural person offering a bribe to a foreign functionary or to an official of an international public organisation	<i>Prosecuting Threshold:</i> RMB 30,000 ⁷⁷	If the offender bribes a foreign functionary or an official of an international public organisation for the purpose of obtaining improper benefits, the case should be criminally docketed and prosecuted ⁷⁸		
	<i>Criminalisation Threshold:</i> RMB 60,000, or RMB 20,000 if it has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁷⁹	If the total bribes are between RMB 60,000 and RMB 2,000,000, ⁸⁰ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 20,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁸¹	Criminal detention, or up to three years’ imprisonment, and monetary penalties	
		If the total bribes exceed RMB 2,000,000, ⁸² or if the total bribes exceed RMB 1,000,000 and the offender also has one of the five aggravating factors specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁸³	Three to 10 years’ imprisonment and monetary penalties	
		If the offender confesses their own bribery offence before prosecution ⁸⁴	A punishment may be lessened from the stipulated range, or entirely exempted	

“Bribe-giving” Offences				
Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors	Penalty	
Entity offering a bribe to a foreign functionary or to an official of an international public organisation	RMB 200,000 ⁸⁵	In respect of such entity	Imposition of a fine	
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel	If the total bribes are between RMB 60,000 and RMB 2,000,000, ⁸⁶ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 20,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁸⁷	Criminal detention, or up to three years’ imprisonment, and monetary penalties
			If the total bribes exceed RMB 2,000,000, ⁸⁸ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 1,000,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁸⁹	Three to 10 years’ imprisonment and monetary penalties
		If the offender confesses own bribery offence before prosecution ⁹⁰	A punishment may be lessened from the stipulated range, or entirely exempted	
Natural person offering a bribe to an entity	RMB 100,000, or less than 100,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 2 of the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards ⁹¹	Not applicable	Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties	
Entity offering a bribe to an Entity	RMB 200,000, or RMB 100,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 2 of the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards ⁹²	In respect of such entity	Imposition of a fine	
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel ⁹³	Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties	

See overleaf

“Bribe-giving” Offences			
Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors	Penalty
Introducing any person to offer bribes to any state functionary	RMB 20,000, or less than RMB 20,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of Section 1 of the <i>SPP Regulations on the Criteria for Filing and Investigation under the Jurisdiction of the People’s Procuratorate</i> (the “ SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards ”) ⁹⁴	Not applicable	Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties
		If the offender confesses their own bribery offences before prosecution ⁹⁵	A punishment may be lessened from the stipulated range, or entirely exempted
Introducing any entity to offer bribes to any state functionary	RMB 200,000, or less than RMB 200,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of Section 1 of the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards ⁹⁶	Not applicable	Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties
		If the offender confesses their own bribery offences before prosecution ⁹⁷	A punishment may be waived or lessened from the stipulated range

“Bribe-accepting” offences

State functionaries, close relatives of, or any persons close to state functionaries, non-state functionaries, and entities are all prohibited from accepting money or property or making use of their position to provide improper benefits to a person seeking such improper benefits.

In general, “improper benefits” are key to a “bribe-accepting” offence, and evidence must be shown that the party accepting the bribe has used their power or position to seek a benefit for the party giving the bribe, except in the following circumstances:

1. any person (whether a state functionary or non-state functionary) who takes advantage of their position to accept and keep for themselves a “kickback” or “handling fee” under any circumstances shall also be regarded as having committed the crime of accepting a bribe;
2. any state functionary who receives bribes exceeding RMB 30,000 from their subordinate and which may affect the performance of their duty; or
3. a promise to seek benefits for others should be regarded as “seeking benefits” for others. If an official clearly knows that a person offering a bribe has a specific request in mind seeking the official’s help, the official will be considered to be “seeking benefits” for others. This circumstance is intended to address situations in which officials accept money or property from bribers who do not request help explicitly, but have some unspoken understanding with the officials regarding benefits sought.

In addition, the provision of money or property does not have to occur sequentially prior to “seeking benefits” for others. The 2016 Judicial Interpretation clarifies that bribes include payments given after benefits are received; i.e., a thank-you gift received after benefits are sought or received still constitutes bribery. Hence, if an official requests nothing in

the performance of duties but later accepts money or property from others based on such performance, that official will be considered to be “seeking benefits for others”.

The table below sets out the monetary thresholds, factors taken into consideration, and the corresponding penalties for the relevant “bribe-accepting” offences under the legislation.

“Bribe-accepting” Offences				
Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors	Penalty	
Acceptance of a bribe by a state functionary	RMB 30,000, or RMB 10,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ⁹⁸	If the total bribes range between RMB 30,000 and RMB 200,000, ⁹⁹ or if total bribes exceed RMB 10,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹⁰⁰	Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment and monetary penalties	
		If the total bribes range between RMB 200,000 and RMB 3,000,000, ¹⁰¹ or if total bribes exceed RMB 100,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹⁰²	Imprisonment for between three and 10 years, monetary penalties or confiscation of property	
		If the total bribes exceed RMB 3,000,000, ¹⁰³ or if total bribes exceed RMB 1,500,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹⁰⁴	10 years’ to life imprisonment, and monetary penalties or confiscation of property	
		If the total bribes exceed RMB 3,000,000, ¹⁰⁵ and caused serious damage to the interests of the state and the people	Life imprisonment or the death penalty and confiscation of property	
		If the offender confesses their own bribery offence before prosecution, repents sincerely, and returns criminal gains actively to avoid or reduce the damage ¹⁰⁶	In respect of factor 1	A lighter punishment within the stipulated range may be imposed, or a punishment may be lessened from the stipulated range, or entirely exempted
			In respect of factors 2, 3, or 4	A lighter punishment within the stipulated range may be imposed

See overleaf

“Bribe-accepting” Offences				
Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors	Penalty	
Acceptance of a bribe by a close relative of, or any person close to, a current or former state functionary	RMB 30,000, or RMB 10,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹⁰⁷	If the total bribes range between RMB 30,000 and RMB 200,000, ¹⁰⁸ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 10,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹⁰⁹	Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment and monetary penalties	
		If the total bribes range between RMB 200,000 and RMB 3,000,000, ¹¹⁰ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 100,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹¹¹	Imprisonment for between three and seven years, and monetary penalties	
		If the total bribes exceed RMB 3,000,000, ¹¹² or if the total bribes exceed RMB 1,500,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹¹³	Fixed-term imprisonment for more than seven years, monetary penalties, or confiscation of property	
Acceptance of a bribe by a non-state functionary	<i>Prosecuting Threshold:</i> RMB 30,000 ¹¹⁴	If an employee of a company, enterprise, or other units take advantage of their positions to solicit or illegally accept bribes for the benefit of other people, or take advantage of their positions during transactions to accept rebates and fees in various names for personal use, case should be criminally docketed and prosecuted ¹¹⁵		
		<i>Criminalisation Threshold:</i> RMB 60,000, or RMB 20,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹¹⁶	If the total bribes range between RMB 60,000 and RMB 1,000,000, ¹¹⁷ or if the total bribes exceed 20,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹¹⁸	Criminal detention, or imprisonment of up to three years, and monetary penalties
			If the total bribes exceed RMB 1,000,000, ¹¹⁹ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 500,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹²⁰	Imprisonment for between three and 10 years, and monetary penalties
		If the total amount of the bribes is “especially huge” or if the bribery is with an “especially aggravating factor” ¹²¹	10 years’ to life imprisonment, and monetary penalties	

See overleaf

“Bribe-accepting” Offences			
Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors	Penalty
Acceptance of a bribe by an entity	RMB 100,000, or less than RMB 100,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 4 of Section 1 of the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards ¹²²	In respect of such entity	Imposition of a fine
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel ¹²³	Criminal detention, or up to five years’ imprisonment

“Aggravating factors” affecting prosecution and sentence

In the last decade, the SPC and the SPP, either jointly or individually, published several judicial interpretations to give further clarification and more concrete guidance to the lower courts and procurators for the prosecution and adjudication of bribery and corruption-related crimes. The 2016 Judicial Interpretation, which is the latest judicial interpretation from the SPC and the SPP, sets out the “aggravating factors” that shall be taken into account in connection with the prosecution and sentencing of individuals offering or accepting bribes.

The “aggravating factors” specified in Art. 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation apply to individuals who committed the offences of offering bribes by:

1. offering bribes to three or more persons;
2. using illegal gains to offer bribes;
3. seeking promotion or adjustment of positions through offering bribes;
4. offering bribes to any state functionary who has supervisory and administrative responsibilities in terms of food, drugs, safe production, environmental protection, etc., to conduct illegal activities;
5. offering bribes to any judicial functionary to influence judicial justice; and/or
6. causing economic losses in the amount of no less than RMB 500,000 and less than RMB 1,000,000.

The “aggravating factors” specified in Art. 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation apply to state functionaries who committed the offences of accepting bribes by:

1. having received party or administrative disciplinary sanctions due to graft, taking bribes, or misappropriating public funds;
2. having been subject to criminal prosecution for intentional crimes;
3. using grafted (i.e., embezzled) funds and goods for illegal activities;
4. refusing to explain the whereabouts of grafted (i.e., embezzled) funds and goods or to cooperate with recovery work, resulting in the funds and goods being unable to be recovered;
5. causing adverse effects or other serious consequences;
6. asking for bribes multiple times;
7. seeking illegitimate benefits for others, resulting in loss to public property, the interests of the state, and the people; and/or
8. seeking promotion or adjustment of positions for others.

Notably, the Eleventh Amendment dated December 2020 revised the penalties for non-state functionaries accepting bribes. It is unclear whether the 2016 Judicial Interpretation remains applicable to the provisions in the *PRC Criminal Law* that were revised by the Eleventh Amendment.

With respect to bribes accepted or offered, the SPP in 1999 and 2000 issued its opinion specifying the prosecution thresholds. According to the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards and the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards, the threshold of prosecuting entities for offering bribes is lowered from RMB 200,000 to RMB 100,000¹²⁴ if one of the following “aggravating factors” is present:

1. gaining unlawful benefits through bribery;
2. bribery of more than three persons or three entities;
3. bribery of Party or government leaders, judicial officers, and administrative enforcement officers; or
4. causing significant damage to the state or the people.

According to the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards, the threshold of prosecuting entities for accepting bribes is lowered to less than RMB 100,000 if one of the following “aggravating factors” is present:¹²⁵

1. intentionally making things difficult, blackmailing relevant entities and individuals, or causing a negative impact;
2. forcibly soliciting property; or
3. causing serious loss to national or social benefits.

Mitigating factors

Pursuant to the Ninth Amendment and the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, a person who offers or pays a bribe, who then voluntarily confesses to his or her crime(s) before prosecution, may receive a mitigated sentence or a lighter sentence within the stipulated range. Further, a person who offers or pays a bribe may be exempted from prosecution or may receive a mitigated sentence if he/she plays a key role in resolving a significant case, or performs meritorious deeds.¹²⁶

Statute of limitations

The limitation periods for the prosecution of a crime are:¹²⁷

1. five years if the maximum penalty for that crime is a term of imprisonment of less than five years;
2. 10 years if the maximum penalty for that crime is a term of imprisonment of between five and 10 years;
3. 15 years if the maximum penalty for that crime is a term of imprisonment of no less than 10 years; and
4. 20 years (which may be extended on approval by the SPP) if the maximum penalty for that crime is life imprisonment or death.

Combat against “bribe-giving”

In September 2021, the State Supervisory Committee, SPP, SPC, and several organs of the Chinese Communist Party jointly published the *Opinions on Further Promoting Investigation into the Acceptance and Giving of Bribes on the Same Level* (the “**Opinions**”).¹²⁸ According to the press release dated 8 September 2021 published on the State Supervisory Committee’s official website, the Opinions reinforce the combat against “bribe-giving” activities. In particular, the Opinions view “bribe-giving” as the root cause of bribery crimes, and condemn “bribe-giving” activities in the same manner as “bribe-accepting” activities, in contrast to the previous practice of imposing lighter punishments for “bribe-giving” activities.

The Opinions require law enforcement authorities to investigate “bribe-giving” and “bribe-accepting” activities together, take various factors into consideration when punishing “bribe-givers”, and form standards for enforcement actions through issuing guidelines

and publishing sample cases. In addition, the Opinions urge increasing penalties on bribe-givers, especially property penalties including confiscation, recovery, and refunds to victims. Enforcement authorities will also coordinate with other government agencies to further deter “bribe-giving” activities by establishing a “blacklist” to ban and/or restrain offenders from entering the markets.

The full texts of the Opinions are currently not available to the public. According to the press release, the Opinions list five types of significant “bribe-giving” activities against which the authorities would take more enforcement actions:

1. giving multiple bribes, of large amounts, or to multiple persons;
2. where “bribe-givers” are members of the Chinese Communist Party or state functionaries;
3. “bribe-giving” in the course of important state projects;
4. “bribe-giving” in certain critical areas or industries (e.g., human resource management of the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese Communist Party’s disciplinary enforcements and judicial enforcements and proceedings, environmental protection, treasury and finance, product safety, food and drugs, poverty alleviation and disaster relief, pension and social security, education, and medical care, etc.); and
5. major commercial bribery.

The Opinions require enforcement authorities to protect legitimate rights of people or companies involved in bribes, and to make a particular effort to avoid abusing the authorities’ restrictive powers.

Some practitioners have highlighted that the Opinions will significantly increase the number of enforcements against bribe-giving activities, including criminal enforcements. Therefore, companies are advised to improve internal compliance programmes to reduce the bribe-related risks.¹²⁹

On 20 April 2022, the State Supervisory Committee and the SPP jointly issued examples of five typical cases of bribe-giving crimes. The five cases span areas over: (1) collusive bidding; (2) bribery in the field of ecology and environment; (3) bribes of a “huge amount”; (4) embezzlement of state assets; and (5) repeated bribery in the pharmaceutical industry.¹³⁰

On 17 October 2022, the Deputy Director of the State Supervisory Committee announced at a press conference of the 20th National People’s Congress that since the 18th National People’s Congress, discipline inspection commissions throughout China had investigated and condemned more than 63,000 bribe-givers, and procuratorates throughout China had investigated and condemned more than 36,000 bribe-givers. As the next steps, the Deputy Director stated that the State Supervisory Committee would continue implementing the blacklist regulations, which would restrict bribe-givers’ qualifications and access to relevant markets.¹³¹

On 9 December 2022, the SPP issued the *Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Handling of Bribe-giving Crime Cases* (the “**Guiding Opinions**”). The Guiding Opinions aim to provide guidelines for local procuratorates throughout China to punish bribe-giving crimes and highlight the following principles:

1. distinguishing bribes offered by individuals and bribes offered by entities based on the ownership of illegitimate interests obtained by offering bribes;
2. combining punishments for bribery with those for other crimes, when the bribery conduct is related to other criminal conducts;
3. tightening sentencing recommendations for bribe-giving crimes with a malicious nature;
4. applying lenient penalties for bribe-giving cases where the offenders confess;

5. considering applying the *Pilot Program on Corporate Compliance Reform* (see details below) for bribe-giving companies and monitoring the compliance commitments by third-party supervision and assessment mechanisms; and
6. intensifying efforts to recover and correct illegitimate interests obtained by offering bribes.¹³²

The Draft Twelfth Amendment of the *PRC Criminal Law*

On 25 July 2023, the Draft Twelfth Amendment of the *PRC Criminal Law* (the “**Draft Twelfth Amendment**”) was submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress for a first-round review.¹³³ On 27 July 2023, the Draft Twelfth Amendment was published for public comments until 24 August 2023.¹³⁴ According to the legislative work plan released by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress on 29 May 2023, the Draft Twelfth Amendment is to be reviewed and adopted in 2023.¹³⁵ According to China’s legislative procedures, the Draft Twelfth Amendment will be submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress for the second review and revisions based on the public comments. If it passes the second review, the Draft Twelfth Amendment will be adopted shortly thereafter and will likely take effect in 2024.

Among others, the Draft Twelfth Amendment proposes the following amendments to the current Criminal Law:

1. adding a new layer penalty of three to 10 years’ imprisonment for responsible employees of an entity that has committed, with serious circumstances, either the crime of offering bribes by an entity or the crime of accepting bribes by an entity (Articles 387 and 393 of the *PRC Criminal Law*);
2. adding a new layer penalty of three to seven years’ imprisonment for an individual that has committed the crime of offering bribes to an entity under serious circumstances (Article 391 of the *PRC Criminal Law*);
3. decreasing the minimum imprisonment term for an individual charged with the crime of offering bribes to state functionaries from five years to three years (Article 390 of the *PRC Criminal Law*);
4. adding six aggravating factors for the crime of offering bribes to state functionaries, i.e., (a) offering multiple bribes, or to multiple persons, (b) offering bribes by state functionaries, (c) offering bribes in the course of important state works or projects, (d) offering bribes in certain critical areas or industries, e.g., human resource management of the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese Communist Party’s disciplinary enforcements, law enforcements and proceedings, ecology and environmental protection, treasury and finance, work safety, food and drugs, poverty alleviation and disaster relief, pension and social security, education, and medical care, etc., (e) offering bribes for the purpose of committing an illegal and/or criminal offense, and (f) using illegal gains to offer bribes (Article 390 of the *PRC Criminal Law*); and
5. adding prohibitions for specific employees of private companies from engaging in certain corruption activities, while only employees in state-owned entities are penalised under the current *PRC Criminal Law*: (a) penalising directors and managers of private companies for illegally engaging in competing businesses; (b) penalising employees of private companies for improperly seeking profits for relatives and friends; and (c) penalising officers of private companies for selling company shares or assets at low prices (Articles 165, 166, and 169 of the *PRC Criminal Law*).

According to a Q&A session in a press release by the Commission of Legislative Affairs of the National People’s Congress’s Standing Committee, one main goal of the proposed

revisions focused on increasing the penalties for offering bribes. The proposed revisions were intended to adjust the disproportion between the number of charged “bribe-giving” cases and that of “bribe-accepting” cases, and also reflected the new enforcement policy of cracking down on “bribe-giving” and “bribe-accepting” offences on the same level.¹³⁶ In addition, the Director of the Commission of Legislative Affairs of the National People’s Congress’s Standing Committee stated at the Q&A session that the proposed new rules of penalising certain private company employees would further promote private companies to effectively prevent and punish internal corruption crimes.¹³⁷ Practitioners commented that if the proposed revision on Article 165 were adopted, directors and managers illegally engaging in competing business would face criminal penalties, compared to civil liabilities under the current legal frame in *PRC Company Law* and *PRC Labor Contract Law*.¹³⁸

The AUCL

A major legislative change in recent years was the revision of the AUCL, which was first released in 1993. In the past 24 years, the AUCL has played an essential role in encouraging and protecting fair commercial competition in China; however, economic development has necessitated revisions to the legislation.

On 4 November 2017, the 30th Session of the Standing Committee of the Twelfth National People’s Congress passed important amendments to the AUCL, and the new AUCL took effect on 1 January 2018. In April 2019, the AUCL’s articles on business secrets were amended.

Definition of commercial bribery under the current AUCL

The AUCL is intended to regulate business activities that may lead to unfair competition. It prohibits, *inter alia*, “commercial bribery”, which is defined as the use by a business operator, of the means of giving money, property or other benefits, to four categories of recipients in order to obtain business transaction opportunities or other competitive advantages.¹³⁹

Compared with the previous version of the AUCL, the current AUCL clarifies the definition of commercial bribery by listing three categories of entities or individuals who could be the recipients of bribes, including: (1) an employee of the other party to a transaction; (2) the entity or individual authorised by the other party to a transaction to handle relevant affairs; and (3) an entity or an individual that uses power or influence to affect a transaction.¹⁴⁰

A significant change introduced in the current version of the AUCL is that the transaction counterparty has been excluded from the categories of potential bribe recipients, which effectively narrows the scope of commercial bribery. Notably, while individual employees of transaction counterparties are included in the categories of potential bribe recipients, transaction counterparties themselves are excluded. On this basis, one potential interpretation is that beneficial payments made between the two transactional parties, such as transactional rebates, may be excluded from the scope of commercial bribery.

The broad scope of prohibition

The term “business operators” is broadly defined as legal persons, or other economic organisations or individuals, who deal with commercial businesses or profitable services.

Pursuant to the Interim Provisions on Prohibition of Commercial Bribery issued by the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (the “**Anti-Commercial Bribery Provisions**”), “property” means cash and tangible assets, and includes promotional fees, advertising fees, sponsorship, research and development fees, consultancy fees, commissions, and expense reimbursements paid in order to see or buy goods.¹⁴¹ The term “other benefits” can include things such as the provision of tours and travel within China or abroad.¹⁴²

Special provision for commercial bribery conducted by employees under the current AUCL

The previous version of the AUCL did not specifically address whether unauthorised conduct of commercial bribery by an employee is attributable to the business operator. In practice, however, the authorities typically regarded any commercial bribery carried out by an employee as an instance of commercial bribery carried out by the individual's employer.

The current AUCL clarifies that bribery committed by an employee of a business is deemed to have been committed by the business.¹⁴³ However, the current AUCL provides an exception that if the business has evidence that the act of the employee is irrelevant to seeking a transaction opportunity or competitive edge for the business, the business will not be liable.¹⁴⁴ The burden is on the employer to provide such evidence.

Safe harbour provisions for the provision of rebates and commissions

The current AUCL retains the safe harbour provisions that allow a business to explicitly pay a discount to the other party to the transaction, or pay a commission to an intermediary, as long as both parties faithfully make a record in their accountancy book.

Under the Law of the PRC on Donations for Public Welfare (the “*Donation Law*”), donations are to be made voluntarily and without charge. Any monetary or goods contributions that are made as donations, but with the commercial purpose of seeking economic benefits or transaction opportunities, will be deemed commercial bribes.¹⁴⁵ The Anti-Commercial Bribery Provisions also provide that business operators shall not provide gifts in the form of cash or articles to counterparties, except for small-amount advertising gifts in accordance with business practices.¹⁴⁶

Penalties under the current AUCL

There are three levels of penalties provided by the current AUCL. If an administrative offence of commercial bribery is found to have taken place, but does not constitute a criminal offence, the authorities will confiscate illegal gains resulting from the offensive conduct, and, depending on the severity of the conduct, impose a fine of between RMB 100,000 and RMB 3,000,000. Further, the authorities are empowered to revoke the business licence of the business operator in question if the situation is sufficiently serious.¹⁴⁷ Whether an act of commercial bribery is considered sufficiently serious will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Furthermore, according to Art. 26 of the current AUCL, if a business receives an administrative penalty for engaging in commercial bribery, the supervision and inspection authority will record the penalty in the business operator's credit record as a matter of public record.

When the violation in question is minor, the business operator will not face administrative penalties if it corrects such misconduct in a prompt and timely fashion. This change, introduced in the current AUCL, appears to address concerns from the business community that the previous version of the AUCL did not credit business operators for maintaining effective compliance programmes and/or taking steps to discover and rectify misconduct.

The current AUCL additionally provides that business operators that carry out commercial bribery and cause damage to third parties are liable to pay compensation. Art. 17 of the current AUCL clarifies that the amount of compensation payable is determined as per the actual loss of the business incurred for the infringement or, if it is difficult to calculate the actual loss, as per the benefits acquired by the tortfeasor from the infringement. Moreover, the amount of compensation shall also include reasonable disbursements made by the business to prevent the infringement.

Draft amendments to the current AUCL

On 22 November 2022, the State Administration for Market Regulation (the “*SAMR*”)

published a revised draft of the AUCL (the “**Draft AUCL Amendment**”) for public comments until 22 December 2022. According to China’s legislative procedures, the SAMR would revise the draft based on public comments and deliver the revised draft to the State Council. Then, after further revisions based on public and internal comments, the State Council would submit the revised draft to the National People’s Congress for review. For instance, in December 2015, the State Administration for Industry and Commerce published a draft amendment to the AUCL for public comments. After rounds of review and revisions, the final draft amendment was adopted by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress on 4 November 2017.¹⁴⁸

Among other proposed revisions, the Draft AUCL Amendment proposes the following revisions to the commercial bribery provisions under the current AUCL:

1. explicitly clarifying that “counterparties in transactions” are within the scope of bribe recipients, which would show the enforcement agencies’ willingness to bring actions against companies that are not explicitly accountable under the current AUCL;
2. specifying that instructing others to give bribes constitutes offence of commercial bribery;
3. prohibiting and specifying penalties for acceptance of bribes, which are not prohibited under the current AUCL; and
4. increasing the maximum fine for both accepting and giving commercial bribes from RMB 3,000,000 to RMB 5,000,000.

If those revisions are adopted by the National People’s Congress, companies will be expected to improve their compliance policies and programmes to address the new concerns raised in the new rules, including risks associated with interactions with counterparties and the acceptance of bribes.

Enforcement by the SAMR

Since its establishment on 10 April 2018, the SAMR has launched enforcement programmes to implement the amended AUCL that cover various industries, including healthcare¹⁴⁹ and e-commerce.¹⁵⁰ In November 2019, the SAMR announced that, in a “100-day Enforcement Programme” for the healthcare industry, which commenced in January 2019, it had worked with 12 other agencies and investigated 28,287 cases involving a total value of RMB 13.7 billion, resulting in total fines of RMB 960,000,000.¹⁵¹ Industry experts commented that continuously intensive enforcement of this anti-corruption campaign would help to promote the reform and development of the PRC healthcare system.¹⁵²

On 12 November 2021, the National Health Commission and other medical authorities issued the *Nine Principles for Integrity Practices for Staff of Medical Institutions* (the “**Nine Principles**”).¹⁵³ The Nine Principles apply to all personnel in medical institutions, including healthcare professionals, back-office employees, and any personnel who provide services in and are managed by medical institutions. The Nine Principles prohibit, among other things, personnel in medical institutions from: (1) accepting commercial commissions, “red packets”, kickbacks, or unlawful donations; (2) disclosing patient information; (3) benefitting from referring patients to other medical institutions; or (4) committing insurance fraud. The Nine Principles replaced the “*Nine Not Allowed*” *Notice of Strengthening Medical And Healthcare Practice*, which was issued earlier in 2013 following a milestone criminal investigation by the Chinese government against an international pharmaceutical company.

Local market administration authorities have proactively taken enforcement actions under the anti-bribery provisions of the amended AUCL. Research by *Wolters Kluwer* shows that in 2022, 73 commercial bribery enforcements were brought by market administration authorities at various levels.¹⁵⁴ As an example, according to the case database on *Wolters*

Kluwer, the Shanghai local administrations for market regulation (“**local AMRs**”) imposed the highest number of administrative penalties against commercial bribery throughout China from January 2018 to August 2023, which makes Shanghai AMR the most active local enforcement agency when it comes to commercial bribery.

On 19 January 2023, the Shanghai AMR published six typical cases of commercial bribery.¹⁵⁵ The six typical cases include: (1) a sanitation equipment company offering cash to a local government officer to obtain business opportunities; (2) a food company offering bribes to a hotel chef, who had selected the food company as a supplier; (3) a pharmaceutical company offering bribes to physicians to promote the sale of their medical products; (4) a medical equipment company offering a “sterilisation fee” to a hospital to supply its products; (5) a freight-forwarding company offering cash to a logistics salesman who provided empty containers to the freight-forwarding company; and (6) a telecommunications service agent offering rebates to other companies’ staff to promote telephone installation services. According to the announcement, in 2022, local AMRs in Shanghai concluded 60 cases of commercial bribery, and the amount of confiscation exceeded RMB 18.53 million (approximately USD 2.7 million).

The SAMR’s responses to questions in connection with commercial bribes

On 6 September 2021, the SAMR published on its website the responses to a question from an anonymous user on the scope of commercial bribery. The question asked whether the following two types of activity would constitute commercial bribery:

1. A medical device operator provides medical equipment to hospitals for free or at a low price, if the agreement restrains the supply of corresponding medical consumables.
2. When a medical device operator sells medical devices or consumables to hospitals, two parties agree that the medical device operator will provide rebates or free products of equivalent value.

According to the SAMR, a business operator is permitted to provide legitimate discount or sales commissions expressly, but is not permitted to provide money, property, or other benefits that are (i) off-book, (ii) improperly recorded in business books and records, or (iii) otherwise given in a secret way. The SAMR’s explanation is consistent with the current AUCL, which allows one party to explicitly give a discount to the other party to the transaction, or pay a commission to an intermediary, as long as both parties truthfully record the discounts or commissions in their books and records.

In practice, the healthcare industry is a hot spot in which the enforcement authorities have issued administrative penalties against commercial bribery, especially in the cases of bundling sales of medical devices and consumables. According to the penalty decisions included in a well-known case database, 20 of the 60 administrative penalties against commercial bribery issued by local AMRs in 2020 related to the healthcare industry, and 10 of the 20 cases involved bundling sales of medical devices and consumables.¹⁵⁶ In 2021, 22 out of 126 publicly available administrative penalties against commercial bribery were related to health industry, and among the 22 cases, local AMRs fined at least six medical device operators for engaging in bundling sales of medical devices and consumables. These decisions show that the parties have explicitly agreed the terms and documented them in the agreements, and none of the decisions analysed the accounting issue in their rationale. In 2022, nine out of 73 publicly available administrative penalties against commercial bribery were in the healthcare industry, including three cases related to bundling sales. As of August 2023, eight out of 34 publicly available administrative penalties against commercial bribery were in the healthcare industry, including two cases related to bundling sales.

That said, the SAMR's explanation might provide additional guidance for local AMRs when assessing whether certain business arrangements would constitute commercial bribery. It remains to be seen how the SAMR's explanation would take effect in practice.

Local implementations of the new AUCL

Some provinces and municipalities (including Beijing, Shanghai, etc.) have published local regulations to implement the commercial bribery provisions of the current AUCL.

On 27 October 2020, the Shanghai Municipal People's Congress adopted the amendment to the *Shanghai Regulation Against Unfair Competition* (the "Shanghai RAUC") to align the Shanghai version of the RAUC to the newly amended AUCL and the amended *PRC Criminal Law*. The Shanghai RAUC took effect on 1 January 2021. Since 2021, an increasing number of local regulations against unfair competition have been amended to implement the current AUCL:

1. on 19 September 2021, the Standing Committee of Hebei Provincial People's Congress adopted the revised *Hebei Regulation Against Unfair Competition*, which took effect on the same day;
2. on 15 November 2021, the Standing Committee of Sichuan Provincial People's Congress adopted the revised *Sichuan Regulation Against Unfair Competition*, which took effect on 1 January 2022;
3. on 24 April 2022, Jiangsu AMR published the draft *Jiangsu Regulation Against Unfair Competition* for public comments;
4. on 29 July 2022, the Standing Committee of Zhejiang Provincial People's Congress issued the revised *Zhejiang Regulation Against Unfair Competition*, which took effect on 1 October 2022;
5. on 1 September 2022, Shanxi Department of Justice published the draft *Shanxi Regulation Against Unfair Competition* for public comments;
6. on 28 September 2022, the Standing Committee of Shanxi Provincial People's Congress published the revised *Shanxi Regulation Against Unfair Competition*, which took effect on 1 December 2022;
7. on 28 September 2022, the Standing Committee of Chongqing Municipal People's Congress published the revised *Chongqing Regulation Against Unfair Competition*, which took effect on 1 January 2023; and
8. on 30 December 2022, Guizhou AMR published the draft *Guizhou Regulation Against Unfair Competition* for public comments.

Recent trend: Enhanced enforcement actions against corruptions in healthcare

Since November 2020, the State Supervisory Committee has been regularly publishing typical cases relating to bribery and corruption offences, and a number of those cases have concerned the integrity of state functionaries in the healthcare industry. The State Supervisory Committee published six cases in 2022 and five cases in 2023 (as of August 2023), in connection with its anti-bribery and corruption campaign in the healthcare industry. For example, in a case published on 6 February 2023, a former director of a state-owned hospital in Sichuan Province was penalised for using his position to accept bribes from a shareholder of a pharmaceutical company and assist the company in procuring contracts with the hospital for the supply of equipment. In December 2022,¹⁵⁷ the former director was sentenced to 13 years in prison and was fined RMB 1.5 million (approximately USD 0.2 million). In another case published on 20 March 2023,¹⁵⁸ a director of a state-owned hospital in Guangxi Province was penalised for misusing his authority to award a medical equipment company a contract in return for payments of RMB 300,000 (approximately

USD 44,000) later. In December 2022, the former director was sentenced to four years and six months in prison and was fined RMB 400,000 (approximately USD 58,000).

The State Supervisory Committee has also been publishing articles on medical and healthcare corruption. For instance, on 6 February 2023, the State Supervisory Committee published a commentary article pointing out covert transfers of benefits in the medical industry by the following means: (1) pharmaceutical companies collude with hospitals in bidding to achieve long-term cooperation; (2) hospital staff and pharmaceutical companies manipulate the hospital procurement; (3) pharmaceutical companies offer equity to hospital employees as a kickback for purchasing drugs; and (4) pharmaceutical companies organise “seminars” to provide hospital employees with improper benefits.¹⁵⁹ On 7 August 2023, the State Supervisory Committee published a commentary article on combatting the crime of offering bribes by entities, stating that offering bribes by entities often occurs in areas which are intensive and abundant in power, funds, and resources, such as the healthcare industry.¹⁶⁰

As mentioned above, the healthcare industry has been one of the SAMR’s enforcement priorities since its establishment in April 2018. According to the case database on *Wolters Kluwer*, in 2021, 2022, and 2023 (as of August 2023), local AMRs had published 22, nine, and eight cases in relation to the healthcare industry, respectively. Among those, in 24 cases, medical companies offered to doctors and/or officers at medical institutions promotion fees, facilitation payments, kickbacks, or “red packets” to obtain more transaction opportunities or to promote the sales of their medical products within hospitals. On 18 November 2022, the SAMR published 10 typical anti-unfair competition enforcement cases, among which two cases were related to commercial bribery in the healthcare industry, including: (1) a pharmaceutical company offered sponsorship fees to a hospital to promote the sale of its medical products (i.e., corrective ear models); and (2) a medical company offered rebates to employees at a hospital who made the decision on behalf of the hospital to purchase the company’s drugs.

In the healthcare industry, pharmaceutical companies may transfer improper benefits in the name of a sponsorship or donation to medical associations. On 15 August 2023, the SAMR published the draft *Compliance Guidelines for Charging Practices of Industry Associations and Chambers* (the “**Draft Compliance Guidelines**”) for public comments until 15 September 2023, which provides comprehensive compliance requirements for trade associations’ charging practices, including membership fees, administrative fees, business service fees, and other charges. Among other things, the Draft Compliance Guidelines stipulate that trade associations should accept donations or funding on a voluntary basis and sign agreements with donors on the rights and obligations of both parties, and explicitly prohibit forcing distribution, transferring benefits, and other improper profit-making activities in the name of donations and sponsorships.¹⁶¹

In both 2022 and 2023, the SAMR, along with other agencies, issued multiple regulations on enhancing enforcement actions in the pharmaceutical and medical industry. The SAMR, along with eight other agencies, issued the *2022 Notice on the Issuance of Main Working Points regarding the Correction of Malpractices in the Field of Pharmaceutical and Medical Industry*. The notice, enacted in May 2022,¹⁶² indicates that the SAMR and other agencies will continue to enhance enforcement actions in the healthcare and pharmaceutical industries. In 2023, the working mechanism on medical industry was expanded from nine authorities to 14 authorities. According to a notice dated 10 May 2023, the working mechanism on the medical industry includes the National Health Commission, National Healthcare Security Administration, National Medical Products Administration, the SAMR, and 10 other authorities, and aims to set up a close collaboration and comprehensive

coverage over malpractices in the medical industry.¹⁶³ On the same day, the 14 ministries and commissions published the *2023 Notice on the Issuance of Main Working Points regarding the Correction of Malpractices in the Field of Pharmaceutical and Medical Industry*,¹⁶⁴ which indicates that the working mechanism will continue to enhance enforcement actions in the healthcare and pharmaceutical industries. Among others, the working points for 2023 focus on benefit transfers, unlawful donations, “red packets”, or kickbacks in relation to medical associations under the name of academic activities.

Furthermore, in July 2023, the National Health Commission, together with nine other ministries and departments (including the Ministry of Public Security and the SAMR), launched a one-year campaign to combat corruption in the healthcare sector, which covers the areas of production, circulation, sales, use, and reimbursement, as well as all related entities in the industry, including pharmaceutical administrative departments, industry associations, medical and health institutions, pharmaceutical production and operation enterprises, medical insurance foundations, etc.¹⁶⁵ According to a Q&A session of a press release by the National Health Commission, the one-year campaign focuses on the following six aspects:

1. misuse of authorities by medical and health administrative departments to seek improper benefits;
2. bribery in connection with key positions in medical and health institutions (especially committed by directors and/or presidents of medical and health institutions), as well as in sales of drugs, equipment, and consumables;
3. misuse of their positions to seek improper benefits by social organisations governed by medical and health administrative authorities;
4. misuse of health insurance fund (e.g., medical insurance fraud by falsifying medical treatment or reselling medical insurance drug);
5. illegal acts by pharmaceutical enterprises during purchases and sales of pharmaceutical products; and
6. violations of the Nine Principles by healthcare professionals (HCPs).¹⁶⁶

Since the release of the *2023 Notice on the Issuance of Main Working Points regarding the Correction of Malpractices in the Field of Pharmaceutical and Medical Industry* and the launch of the National Health Commission’s one-year campaign, local health commissions (including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Shannxi, Hebei, Jiangxi, etc.) have been publishing implementation rules to further execute the anti-corruption campaign at the local level of different provinces.

According to non-exhaustive statistics in a news report published by a Chinese state-owned media dated 19 August 2023, since the beginning of 2023, at least 184 hospital directors and/or presidents have been investigated.¹⁶⁷ Practitioners commented that local enforcement agencies would step up their enforcement efforts in the recent anti-corruption actions, especially by adopting stricter enforcement standards for lecture fees and academic conferences.¹⁶⁸

Law and policy relating to issues such as facilitation payments and hospitality

There is no exception under Chinese laws for facilitation payments or hospitality as there is under the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977 (the “FCPA”). Therefore, to determine whether facilitation payments and hospitality constitute a violation or offence in China, it is essential to determine the “money or property” for the purpose of obtaining “improper benefits” under the *PRC Criminal Law* and “commercial bribery” under the AUCL, as discussed above.

Key issues relating to investigation, decision-making, and enforcement procedures

The risks discussed in the sections above are global, and companies operating in China and in the global environment should implement policies and procedures to help prevent violations and remediate them as soon as any potential issue surfaces. Such policies and procedures should include elements of prevention, investigation, and remediation.

Prevention – effective compliance programme

An effective compliance programme, which incorporates tough anti-bribery policies and comprehensive internal control measures reflecting a strong stance against corruption from the board of directors and senior management, can lead to early identification of corruption risks. Such a programme should focus on the company's policies and procedures with respect to gifts, entertainment, and other hospitality, and on dealings with third-party representatives and business partners, who should undergo due diligence to ensure compliance, sign anti-corruption representations, and be subject to anti-corruption training as appropriate.

A compliance or audit function that periodically reviews company practices for their risk of corruption and a group that oversees the implementation and maintenance of the anti-corruption programme are critical to early detection and prevention. Confidential reporting channels – for example, a private hotline through which employees can feel safe to report issues – have also proven effective in detecting risks. Such reporting avenues must be accompanied by assurances that no retaliation will result from reporting corruption. Appropriate training for all levels of the organisation, as well as positive incentives that promote compliance with company policy and the law, should be prescribed. Periodically updating the programme is vital, to ensure it keeps pace with continuing developments in anti-bribery laws and regulations in China.

Investigation – quick and adequate response to corruption allegations

Corporations must be prepared to conduct internal investigations of corruption allegations, whether raised because of the compliance programme or raised by enforcement agencies, the media, or whistle-blowers.

It is important and prudent to carefully choose the body responsible for conducting any internal investigation. There may be instances in which an independent investigation is required, and allegations involving senior management, or investigations requiring specialist skills, should ideally be handled by independent, external counsel.

The designated investigative body should be properly resourced and the scope of the investigation should be proportionate to the scope of the allegations. Any investigation in China should be conducted in accordance with Chinese privacy, labour, and other local laws. Attorney-client privilege should also be maintained to provide confidentiality and protect against retaliation.

Remediation – appropriate corrective measures

Should an internal investigation corroborate corruption allegations, corporations must implement appropriate and adequate remedial measures, with appropriate oversight from the board of directors.

Corporations should examine and correct gaps identified in the existing corporate policies and compliance programmes. Corporations are advised to assess whether the identified issues affect its internal controls over financial reporting, and take appropriate remedial steps accordingly.

Consideration should also be given to whether the identified issues should be disclosed to authorities, having regard to the improper conduct and practices identified, the company's legal obligations, and disclosure obligations under local and/or foreign laws.

Pilot Program on Corporate Compliance Reform

In April 2021, the SPP announced a *Pilot Program on Corporate Compliance Reform* (the

“**Pilot Program**”).¹⁶⁹ The Pilot Program provides that in criminal cases involving enterprises, before the defendants are prosecuted, the procuratorate can encourage enterprises to give and execute compliance commitments. The procuratorate/court may make decisions of non-detention, non-prosecution, or mitigated penalties based on the effects of the compliance commitment. The Pilot Program has been executed in 10 provinces and municipalities.¹⁷⁰

According to local implementations publicly available¹⁷¹ under the Pilot Program, when the procuratorate prepares to file a charge against a crime committed by an enterprise, or a crime committed by managers or key personnel in connection with production and/or operation of an enterprise, the procuratorate can grant a grace period (usually three to five months) and, as supported by other relevant administrative authorities (depending on various crimes), guide the enterprise to design and implement a compliance programme to address the weaknesses reflected in the committed crime. At the end of the grace period, the procuratorate will consider all the facts and circumstances in connection with the crime, as well as the completion of the compliance programme and the compliance assessment by other administrative authorities on the enterprise, to decide whether they will bring a charge against the enterprise or the individuals involved. The Pilot Program usually does not apply to serious crimes (e.g., crimes against national security, terrorism crimes, crimes with a statutory penalty over 10 years’ imprisonment, or crimes involving casualties).¹⁷²

In June 2021, the SPP, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance (the “**MOF**”), SAMR, Ministry of Ecology and Environment, State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, State Tax Administration, All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, and China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (the “**Assessment Authorities**”) jointly issued the *Pilot Guidance on the Establishment of Third-party Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism for Compliance of Enterprises Involved in Crimes* (the “**Pilot Guidance**”). According to the Pilot Guidance, the Assessment Authorities will form an independent committee of supervision and evaluation (the “**Supervision and Evaluation Committee**”) that can further engage a pool of experts, including lawyers, auditors, and tax accountants.¹⁷³ The Supervision and Evaluation Committee randomly selects experts from the expert pool to form a team, which will assess the effectiveness of, and prepare a written assessment report on, a compliance programme that an enterprise establishes under the Pilot Program.¹⁷⁴ However, it is unclear whether any administrative authorities, other than the team or the Assessment Authorities, can also assist in the assessment.

Some commentators view the Pilot Program supported by the Pilot Guidance as a first step in the so-called “compliance program for non-prosecution” in China, believing that this will lead the trend in the anti-commercial bribery regimes in place in China.¹⁷⁵

After the announcement of the Pilot Program, the SPP has published several batches of typical cases. For example, on 3 June 2021, the SPP released four “typical cases in the corporate compliance reform pilot”.¹⁷⁶ In a case handled by the Nanshan District Procuratorate, in which a company’s employees offered bribes to non-state functionaries, the prosecutors decided not to prosecute the company after evaluating the case. The prosecutors signed a compliance supervision agreement with the company to assist the company in carrying out compliance rectification and construction works. The supervision agreement focuses on the company’s internal governance structure, policies and procedures, and personnel management, which were closely related to potential commercial bribery crimes.

In 2022, the Pilot Program was effectively implemented and the scope of corporate compliance cases handled by local procuratorates continued to expand. On 2 April 2022, the SPP held a press conference in which it announced that it expanded the corporate compliance pilot programme to a broader scope.¹⁷⁷ The SPP clarified that corporate compliance pilot

programmes and third-party mechanisms can be applied to both private and state-owned companies, whether they are listed or not.¹⁷⁸ According to an SPP press release in August 2022, an officer of the Fourth Prosecution Office of the SPP said that procuratorates throughout the country had handled a total of 2,382 corporate compliance cases, including “bribe-giving” and “bribe-accepting” cases, from March 2021 to the end of June 2022. Of those, 1,584 cases adopted third-party supervision and assessment mechanisms, and concluded non-prosecution decisions on 606 companies and 1,159 individuals.¹⁷⁹

According to a press release published by the SPP on 18 February 2023, the Director of the Fourth Prosecution Office of the SPP said that in 2022, procuratorates throughout the country had handled a total of 5,150 corporate compliance cases, including both “bribe-giving” and “bribe-accepting” cases. Among those cases, 3,577 cases adopted third-party supervision and assessment mechanisms, resulting in non-prosecution decisions for 1,498 companies and 3,501 individuals. As the next steps, the Director said that procuratorates will further explore how to apply the corporate compliance pilot programme to complex cases and other cases involving state-owned enterprises, large private companies, or multinational companies.¹⁸⁰

Conclusion

Anti-corruption enforcement is increasingly global in scope. As summarised, China has been aggressively enforcing its own anti-corruption laws on a sustained basis. China’s approach to enforcement has and will continue to mean vigorous multinational anti-corruption enforcement, targeting domestic and foreign companies and individuals. In addition, recent trends suggest that the law enforcement and judicial authorities of China are starting to test the approach of “combining punishment with leniency”, as shown in the Pilot Program.

With adequate preparation and resources, companies can effectively mitigate enforcement risks. Corporations with business in China should have appropriate preventative measures, well-functioning investigation procedures, and, if necessary, remediation measures to mitigate any potential financial and reputational risks. These measures will help to minimise, if not eliminate, the risk of employees falling foul of China’s anti-corruption measures, as well as anti-corruption laws of other jurisdictions. These risks will not go away without the right corporate attitude, resources and attention, and vigilance is key to protecting companies and individuals in this environment of increasing enforcement.

Overview of cross-border issues

Foreign entities operating in China can and have been investigated and charged in connection with the aforementioned sustained anti-corruption campaign. In the summer of 2013, one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, a British company listed on both the London and New York stock exchanges, became the focus of the biggest corruption scandal in China involving a foreign company. The chain of events was set in motion by two chains of emails accusing the company of bribing HCPs in order to promote the company’s medical products in China. In September 2014, the company was found by the Changsha Intermediate People’s Court in Hunan Province to have offered money or property to non-government personnel in order to obtain improper commercial gains, and was found guilty of bribing non-government personnel. As a result of the court’s verdict, the company was ordered to pay a fine of RMB 3,000,000,000 (GBP 297,000,000) to the Chinese government. Five former senior executives of the company were sentenced to suspended imprisonment of two to three years.

Following this investigation, the State Administration of Industry and Commerce stated that local Administrations of Industry and Commerce should pay more attention to industries affecting the public interest (including the pharmaceutical industry), strengthen

their supervision over the bidding activities carried out by industry players, and conduct thorough investigations against any commercial bribery arising from the bidding process.¹⁸¹ The Chinese authorities subsequently visited a number of foreign drug manufacturers.¹⁸²

More recently, in April 2021, the MOF announced administrative penalties on 19 pharmaceutical companies, including the Chinese subsidiaries of some foreign companies. These 19 companies violated Article 42 of the *PRC Accounting Law* by: (1) using false invoices and bills to obtain funds for use; (2) falsifying business matters or using pharmaceutical promotion companies to obtain funds; and (3) failing to comply with accounting books and records rules or having other accounting issues.¹⁸³

Recently, the US Department of Justice and the US Securities and Exchange Commission (“SEC”) have announced further instances of FCPA enforcement in the technology and manufacturing industries, in addition to the traditional FCPA focus areas of pharmaceutical and medical devices. The technology and manufacturing industries (especially automobile electronics manufacturing) will also be likely areas of focus for anti-corruption efforts in China.

Cross-border issues have become increasingly complicated and challenging since China enacted the *PRC International Criminal Judicial Assistance Law* in October 2018, amended Art. 177 of the *PRC Securities Law* in December 2019, and enacted the *PRC Data Security Law* and the *PRC Personal Information Protection Law* in September 2021 and November 2021, respectively. These pieces of legislation have been serving as “blocking” statutes that restrain foreign countries from exercising extraterritorial jurisdictions or accessing data located in Mainland China over bribery and corruption inside China. Special approvals from the relevant Chinese authorities are now required before any entity or individual within the territory of China can provide evidence or other assistance to any foreign criminal proceedings or investigation into the violation of securities laws.

Another major problem regarding cross-border bribery and corruption issues lies in the jurisdiction of the PRC courts. As discussed, foreign persons or entities are subject to the same legislation when doing business in China.¹⁸⁴

Corporate liability for bribery and corruption offences

The PRC Criminal Law

Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors	Penalty
“Bribe-giving” Cases			
Entity offering a bribe to a state functionary	RMB 200,000, or RMB 100,000 if it has an aggravating factor specified in Article 3 of the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards ¹⁸⁵	In respect of such entity	Imposition of a fine
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel ¹⁸⁶	Criminal detention or up to five years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties
Entity offering a bribe to a close relative of, or any person close to, a current or former state functionary	RMB 200,000 ¹⁸⁷	In respect of such entity	Imposition of a fine
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel ¹⁸⁸	Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties

Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors		Penalty
“Bribe-giving” Cases				
Entity offering a bribe to a non-state functionary	RMB 200,000 ¹⁸⁹	In respect of such entity		Imposition of a fine
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel	If the total bribes are between RMB 60,000 and RMB 2,000,000, ¹⁹⁰ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 20,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹⁹¹	Criminal detention, or up to three years’ imprisonment, and monetary penalties
			If the total bribes exceed RMB 2,000,000, ¹⁹² or if the total bribes range exceed RMB 1,000,000 and the offender also has one of the five aggravating factors specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹⁹³	Three to 10 years’ imprisonment and monetary penalties
If the offender confesses their own bribery offence before prosecution ¹⁹⁴	A punishment may be lessened from the stipulated range, or entirely exempted			

See overleaf

Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors		Penalty
“Bribe-giving” Cases				
Entity offering a bribe to a foreign functionary or to an official of an international public organisation	RMB 200,000 ¹⁹⁵	In respect of such entity		Imposition of a fine
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel	If the total bribes are between RMB 60,000 and RMB 2,000,000, ¹⁹⁶ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 20,000 and the offender also has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹⁹⁷	Criminal detention, or up to three years’ imprisonment, and monetary penalties
			If the total bribes exceed RMB 2,000,000, ¹⁹⁸ or if the total bribes exceed RMB 1,000,000 and the offender also has one of the five aggravating factors specified in Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation ¹⁹⁹	Three to 10 years’ imprisonment and monetary penalties
If the offender confesses their own bribery offence before prosecution ²⁰⁰	A punishment may be lessened from the stipulated range, or entirely exempted			
Natural person offering a bribe to an entity	RMB 100,000, or less than 100,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 2 of the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards ²⁰¹			Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties
Entity offering a bribe to an Entity	RMB 200,000, or RMB 100,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 2 of the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards ²⁰²	In respect of such entity		Imposition of a fine
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel ²⁰³		Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties

Offence	Threshold for Prosecution and Sentencing	Relevant Factors	Penalty
“Bribe-giving” Cases			
Introducing any entity to offer bribes to any state functionary	RMB 200,000, or less than RMB 200,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 7 of Section 1 of the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards ²⁰⁴		Criminal detention or up to three years’ imprisonment, plus monetary penalties
		If the offender confesses their own bribery offences before prosecution ²⁰⁵	A punishment may be waived or lessened from the stipulated range
“Bribe-accepting” Cases			
Acceptance of a bribe by an entity	RMB 100,000, or less than RMB 100,000 but has an aggravating factor specified in Article 4 of Section 1 of the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards ²⁰⁶	In respect of such entity	Imposition of a fine
		In respect of its Responsible Personnel ²⁰⁷	Criminal detention, or up to five years’ imprisonment

The year ahead

We look forward to 2024 with interest as the regulatory and enforcement landscape continues to evolve in the anti-bribery space, in respect of both individuals and entities.

* * *

Endnotes

1. https://www.spp.gov.cn/spp/gzbg/202303/t20230317_608767.shtml
2. *Id.*
3. *Id.*
4. <https://www.court.gov.cn/zixun-xiangqing-391381.html>
5. <https://www.chinacourt.org/article/detail/2021/06/id/6114283.shtml>
6. https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/toutiaon/202202/t20220224_174022.html
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13. See “Documentation” – “Report” – “III. Organization of the session D. Attendance” for the nine sessions at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/COSP/conference-of-the-states-parties.html>
14. <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgvienna/chn/hyyfy/t1110120.htm> / <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgvienna/chn/hyyfy/t1509495.htm> / <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgvienna/chn/hyyfy/t1727580.htm> / https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjbxw_673019/202112/t20211214_10469628.shtml / <https://www.unodc.org/>

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15. Article 93 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
16. Article 391 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
17. Article 389 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
18. Article 390-A of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
19. Article 164 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
20. Article 164 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
21. Article 391 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
22. Article 393 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
23. Article 392 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
24. Article 385 and Article 388 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
25. Article 388-A of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
26. Article 163 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
27. Article 387 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
28. Article 163 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
29. https://www.spp.gov.cn/xwfbh/wsfbt/202204/t20220429_555906.shtml#2
30. https://www.spp.gov.cn/xwfbh/wsfbt/202204/t20220429_555906.shtml#1
31. https://www.spp.gov.cn/xwfbh/wsfbt/202204/t20220429_555906.shtml#3
32. Article 10 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
33. Article 11 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
34. Article 12 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
35. Article 6 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
36. Article 7 of the 2008 Commercial Bribery Opinion.
37. Article 12 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
38. Article 9 of the 2008 Commercial Bribery Opinion.
39. Article 23 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
40. Article 389 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
41. Article 10 of the 2008 Commercial Bribery Opinion.
42. Article 164 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
43. According to Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, such aggravating factors include: (i) offering bribes to no less than three persons; (ii) use of illegal income for offering bribes; (iii) seeking a promotion or position adjustment by offering bribes; (iv) for the purpose of conducting illegal activities, offering bribes to any state personnel engaged in supervision and administration of food, drugs, work safety, and environmental protection; (v) offering bribes to judicial officers, which affects judicial justice; or (vi) the amount of economic losses which ranges between RMB 500,000 to RMB 1,000,000.
44. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
45. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 42 above.
46. Article 8 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
47. According to Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, such aggravating factors include: (i) offering bribes to no less than three persons; (ii) use of illegal income for offering bribes; (iii) seeking a promotion or position adjustment by offering bribes; (iv) for the purpose of conducting illegal activities, offering bribes to any state personnel engaged in supervision and administration of food, drugs, work safety, and environmental protection; and (v) offering bribes to judicial officers, which affects judicial justice.
48. Article 9 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.

49. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 46 above.
50. Article 390 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
51. Article 390 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
52. According to the Article 3 of the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards, such aggravating factors include: (i) seeking illegal interests; (ii) offering bribes to no less than three persons; (iii) offering bribes to CPC cadres, governmental cadres, judicial staff or law enforcement personnel; or (iv) causing serious loss to the national or social benefits.
53. Article 393 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
54. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 42 above.
55. Article 7 and Article 10 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
56. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 42 above.
57. Article 8 and Article 10 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
58. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 46 above.
59. Article 9 and Article 10 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
60. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 46 above.
61. Article 10 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
62. Article 390-A of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
63. Article 11 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
64. Article 11 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
65. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 42 above.
66. Article 7 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
67. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 42 above.
68. Article 8 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
69. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 46 above.
70. Article 164 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
71. Article 11 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
72. Article 7 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
73. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 42 above.
74. Article 8 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
75. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 46 above.
76. Article 164 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
77. Article 12 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
78. Article 12 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
79. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 42 above.
80. Article 7 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
81. According to Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, such aggravating factors include: (i) offering bribes to no less than three persons; (ii) use of illegal income for offering bribes; (iii) seeking a promotion or position adjustment by offering bribes; (iv) for the purpose of conducting illegal activities, offering bribes to any state personnel engaged in supervision and administration of food, drugs, work safety, and environmental protection; (v) offering bribes to judicial officers, which affects judicial justice; or (vi) the amount of economic losses so caused is not less than RMB 500,000.
82. Article 8 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
83. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 46 above.
84. Article 164 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
85. Article 12 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
86. Article 7 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.

87. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 80 above.
88. Article 8 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
89. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 46 above.
90. Article 164 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
91. According to Article 2 of the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards, such aggravating factors include: (i) seeking illegal interests; (ii) offering bribes to no less than three entities; (iii) offering bribes to the CPC and government entity, judicial entity or law enforcement entity; or (iv) causing serious loss to the national or social benefits.
92. *Id.*
93. Article 391 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
94. According to Article 7 of Section 1 of the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards, such aggravating factors include: (i) assisting the briber to seek illegal interests; (ii) introducing bribery no less than three person/times; (iii) introducing bribery to the CPC cadres, governmental cadres, judicial staff or law enforcement personnel; or (iv) causing serious loss to the national or social benefits. Also see endnote 51, Article 2 of the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards.
95. Article 392 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
96. Article 7 of Section 1 of the SPP 2016 Prosecution Standards, see endnote 93 above.
97. Article 392 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
98. According to Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, such aggravating factors include: (i) accepting bribes for multiple times; (ii) seeking improper benefits for others, resulting in losses to public property, the state and people's interests; or (iii) seeking promotions and position adjustments for others.
99. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
100. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
101. Article 2 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
102. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
103. Article 3 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
104. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
105. Article 3 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
106. Article 383 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
107. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
108. Article 1 and Article 10 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
109. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
110. Article 2 and Article 10 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
111. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
112. Article 3 and Article 10 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
113. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
114. Article 10 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
115. Article 10 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
116. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
117. Article 1 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
118. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
119. Article 2 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
120. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
121. Article 163 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
122. According to the Article 4 of Section 1 of the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards, such aggravating factors include: (i) intentionally making things difficult, blackmailing

- relevant entities and individuals, causing a bad impact; (ii) forcibly soliciting property; or (iii) causing the state or social interests to suffer significant losses.
123. Article 387 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
124. Article 2 and Article 3 of the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards, Article 6 and Article 8 of Section 1 of the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards.
125. Article 4 of Section 1 of the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standard.
126. Article 390 of the *PRC Criminal Law* and Article 14 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
127. Article 87 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
128. https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/toutiao/202109/t20210908_249687.html. The original text of the Opinions is not available on public domain. Our comments here are in reference to the press release.
129. See, for example, <https://law.wkinfo.com.cn/professional-articles/detail/NjAwMDAxMzQ5MTE%3D?searchId=693a1d5e58a5431b8c748f3041e485ab&index=1&q=%E5%8F%97%E8%B4%BF%E8%A1%8C%E8%B4%BF%E4%B8%80%E8%B5%B7%E6%9F%A5&module=>
130. https://www.spp.gov.cn/spp/xwfbh/wsfbt/202204/t20220420_554587.shtml#2
131. <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2022/10-17/9874812.shtml>
132. https://www.spp.gov.cn/spp/xwfbh/wsfbt/202212/t20221209_595081.shtml
133. <https://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202307/621e30cc9ac94229a2f93c7b3eb2459c.shtml>
134. <https://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/kgfb/202307/719eca03d1a84b88a771cdafd2f290da.shtml>
135. <https://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202305/3369dcb74761426d92fd19a19cb9ac98.shtml>
136. <https://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202307/ffd67b994dd74f07a00c79be97218571.shtml>
137. *Id.*
138. For instance, see <https://law.wkinfo.com.cn/professional-articles/detail/NjAwMDAyMTcyMzA>
139. Article 7 of the AUCL.
140. *Id.*
141. Article 2 of the Anti-Commercial Bribery Provisions.
142. *Id.*
143. Article 7 of the AUCL.
144. *Id.*
145. Article 4 of the *Donation Law*.
146. Article 8 of the Anti-Commercial Bribery Provisions.
147. Article 19 of the AUCL.
148. <https://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/201711/5c035718fda544198d071a28b5eabcf3.shtml>
149. https://www.samr.gov.cn/jjj/fbzdjz/201911/t20191108_308293.html
150. https://www.samr.gov.cn/jjj/fbzdjz/201906/t20190624_302695.html
151. https://www.samr.gov.cn/jjj/fbzdjz/201911/t20191108_308293.html
152. <https://www.chinacourt.org/article/detail/2020/08/id/5390263.shtml>
153. https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2022/content_5678098.htm
154. <https://law.wkinfo.com.cn/administrative-punishment/list?citeId=MTAwMTE1Njc2NThfWjJUNw%3D%3D&tip=&rdt=1692000927123>
155. <https://scjgj.sh.gov.cn/602/20230119/2c984ad685bea31e0185c7d42b0f35ec.html>
156. There are some administrative penalty decisions that did not detail the violation facts, so the number of cases actually involving the bundling of sales of medical devices and consumables is likely to be higher.

157. https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/toutun/202302/t20230206_244838.html
158. https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/toutun/202303/t20230320_253756.html
159. https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/toutiaon/202302/t20230206_244791.html
160. https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/toutiaon/202308/t20230807_280935.html
161. https://www.samr.gov.cn/hd/zjdc/art/2023/art_631bf88023f3434a8316f415aa1e1097.html
162. https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2022-06/07/content_5694468.htm
163. <https://www.nhc.gov.cn/ylyjs/pqt/202305/032224505e074e64bd3b1af7d1d0e91e.shtml>; 164; <https://www.nhc.gov.cn/ylyjs/pqt/202305/367e4708c706413592727976ca7c8c11.shtml>
164. <https://www.nhc.gov.cn/cms-search/xxgk/getManuscriptXxgk.htm?id=e3d690702571455dbdd301f2bc9e7a3c>; <https://www.nhc.gov.cn/ylyjs/pqt/202305/d3950b33987243f09981ed74b5283162.shtml>
165. <https://www.nhc.gov.cn/ylyjs/pqt/202308/f39311862637470ab199f8fa2fef8449.shtml>
166. *Id.*
167. https://news.cnr.cn/native/gd/20230819/t20230819_526385832.shtml?ivk_sa=1023197a
168. See, for example, <https://law.wkinfo.com.cn/professional-articles/detail/NjAwMDAyMTk1NTk%3D?q=>
169. https://www.spp.gov.cn/xwfbh/wsfbt/202104/t20210408_515148.shtml#1
170. *Id.*
171. See, for example, *Opinions on Establishment of a Compliance Inspection System for Enterprises Involved in Crimes* published by Liaoning Provincial People’s Procuratorate and nine other authorities on 16 December 2020.
172. *Id.* According to the *Opinions on Establishment of a Compliance Inspection System for Enterprises Involved in Crimes*, the compliance programme for non-prosecution cannot be applied to cases with a potential penalty of over 10 years’ imprisonment, cases involving casualties, and certain other types of crime.
173. For the latest list of experts for the third-party mechanism, please refer to https://www.acfic.org.cn/zzjg_327/nsjg/flb/flbtzgg/202112/W020211216378694152593.pdf (dated 16 December, 2021).
174. According to the Pilot Guidance, the Third-party Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism shall only be applied to economic crimes or duty-related crimes committed by enterprises or actual controllers, managers and key technical staff of enterprises, under the situation where the defendants plead guilty, and the enterprises involved agree to accept the Third-party Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism. The Pilot Program does not go into such details. It is therefore not clear whether the above conditions apply to all enterprises developing and implementing compliance programmes under the Pilot Program.
175. <https://www.zhonglun.com/Content/2021/04-30/1701214583.html>
176. https://www.spp.gov.cn/xwfbh/wsfbh/202106/t20210603_520232.shtml
177. https://www.spp.gov.cn/zd gz/202204/t20220402_553256.shtml
178. *Id.*
179. https://www.spp.gov.cn/xwfbh/wsfbt/202208/t20220810_570413.shtml#1
180. https://www.spp.gov.cn/zd gz/202302/t20230218_602406.shtml
181. “SAIC: Focused Investigation of Commercial Bribery arising from Drug Sales”, *China Business News*, 21 August 2013.
182. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-roche-hldg-china-idUSBREA4L09Y20140522>
183. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-04/13/content_5599221.htm
184. Article 6 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.

185. Article 1 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 97 above.
186. Article 393 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
187. Article 10 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
188. Article 390-A of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
189. Article 11 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
190. Article 7 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
191. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 42.
192. Article 8 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
193. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 46.
194. Article 164 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
195. Article 12 of the 2022 Prosecution Standards.
196. Article 7 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
197. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 42.
198. Article 8 and Article 11 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation.
199. Article 7 of the 2016 Judicial Interpretation, see endnote 46.
200. Article 164 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
201. Article 2 of the SPP 2000 Prosecution Standards, see endnote 90.
202. *Id.*
203. Article 391 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
204. Article 7 of the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards, see endnote 93.
205. Article 392 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.
206. According to the Article 4 of Section 1 of the SPP 1999 Prosecution Standards, such aggravating factors include: (i) intentionally making things difficult, blackmailing relevant entities and individuals, causing a bad impact; (ii) forcibly soliciting property; or (iii) causing the state or social interests to suffer significant losses.
207. Article 387 of the *PRC Criminal Law*.

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