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18 October 2021

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China: Treatment of members of house churches [also known as jiatang churches; jiatang congregations; family churches; home churches; unregistered churches], including Protestant, Catholic, and other Christian house churches, by the authorities; the enforcement of the revised regulation on religious affairs in 2018; legal recourse (2019–October 2021)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

Sources report that there are many Christian groups in China, including some with beliefs diverging from the orthodox teachings of Christianity; therefore, it can be difficult to determine whether a group is Christian and different stakeholders, including the State, academics, and concerned religious groups, may have conflicting perspectives (Professor 10 Sept. 2021; Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021). The UK Home Office reports that the exact number of Christians in China is unknown and estimates "var[y] greatly" (UK Nov. 2019, para. 2.4.1, 3.1.2). The Chinese government's 2018 white paper on religious freedom states that the country has 38 million Protestants and 6 million Catholics (China 4 Apr. 2018, Sec. III). According to AsiaNews, a Christian news source (AsiaNews 3 Dec. 2003), "Protestant groups" estimate that 80 to 90 million people in China are members of "underground [c]hurches," compared to the approximately 20 million who are registered under the officially recognized Three-Self Patriotic Movement (AsiaNews 27 Mar. 2019). According to an article published in *Christianity Today* [1] by Fenggang Yang, founding editor of the *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* and head of the Purdue University Center on Religion and Chinese Society, "tens of thousands" of house churches of different sizes exist in China (*Christianity Today* 31 Dec. 2019).

Sources indicate that Christian groups in China are divided into official, house and underground churches (Professor 10 Sept. 2021; Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.77). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a professor at a university located in the US, whose research focuses on Protestants in China and who has conducted extensive fieldwork in the country, stated that house churches are "mainstream," hold beliefs and practices similar to official churches, and receive "more lenien[t]" treatment (Professor 10 Sept. 2021). The same source also noted that underground churches are "more extreme" and "secretive" and receive "more hars[h]" treatment (Professor 10 Sept. 2021). A 2019 Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

country information report on China indicates that house churches are Protestant while underground churches are Catholic (Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.77).

The UK Home Office reports that unregistered religious groups, including "underground house churches," are "illegal and risk having their activities restricted and their places of worship closed down" (UK July 2021, para. 2.4.9). According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), an independent and non-partisan US-based think tank and publisher on international affairs (CFR n.d.), China has "one of the largest populations of religious prisoners" in the world, estimated to number in the "tens of thousands" (CFR 25 Sept. 2020).

2. Legislation

Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, amended in 2018, provides the following:

Citizens of the People's Republic of China shall enjoy freedom of religious belief.

No state organ, social organization or individual shall coerce citizens to believe in or not to believe in any religion, nor shall they discriminate against citizens who believe in or do not believe in any religion.

The state shall protect normal religious activities. No one shall use religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the state's education system.

Religious groups and religious affairs shall not be subject to control by foreign forces. (China 1982)

According to sources, the Chinese constitution allows for "'normal religious activities'" (*Time* 2 Jan. 2020; CFR 25 Sept. 2020; US 12 May 2021, 1); "'normal'" is not defined in the constitution (CFR 25 Sept. 2020; US 12 May 2021, 1). Sources further indicate that China officially recognizes two branches of Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism

(CFR 25 Sept. 2020; Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.37). Sources indicate that the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) monitors the state-recognized religious organizations (CFR 25 Sept. 2020; Freedom House Feb. 2017, 15). China's white paper on religious freedom lists the following national religious organizations for Christians in China:

- Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association,
- Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China,
- National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China, and
- China Christian Council. (China 4 Apr. 2018, Sec. III)

In a 2018 report on freedom of religion, the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) states that religious affairs agencies at the local level have jurisdiction over the "state-sanctioned 'patriotic' religious associations that act as liaisons between the government and practitioners of the five 'main' religions in China" (US 8 Oct. 2018, 123). The *Christianity Today* article similarly reports the case of a church that was required to submit an application to its local religious affairs bureau in order to register with the government (*Christianity Today* 31 Dec. 2019). According to sources, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members [and members of the armed forces (US 12 May 2021, 1)] must be atheists (US 12 May 2021, 1; CFR 25 Sept. 2020). Sources report that under Chinese law, minors under the age of 18 are also "effectively barr[ed]" from participating in "most" religious activities (US 12 May 2021, 1) or "forbid[den]" from attending church (Professor 10 Sept. 2021). Sources note that in 2018, the SARA was absorbed into the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD), making the latter responsible for managing religious affairs (US 8 Oct. 2018, 2; Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.39). The US CECC report notes that the CCP's stated purpose for the restructuring was to "strengthen the Party's control over 'religious work'" and that the agency would continue to interact with external actors under the SARA name (US 8 Oct. 2018, 122).

2.1 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs

A summary of the 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs, published by the State Council of China, indicates that the rights of religious organizations include the following:

Religious groups, schools, temples and churches are allowed to publish materials for their internal use.

...

Religious groups, schools, and venues can manage and use public assets or collective ownership assets in accordance with laws and regulations.

Land, houses, facilities and other legitimate assets of religious groups, schools and venues are protected by law.

Religious groups, schools and venues can accept overseas or domestic donations for charitable causes. (China 7 Sept. 2017)

The same source indicates that the 2018 Regulations include the following restrictions on religious organizations:

Venues for religious activities include temples, churches and other fixed places.

Other gathering places should be determined by the religious affairs departments of province-level governments.

Venues for religious activities are urged to strengthen internal management, improve management system in personnel, finance, assets, relics protection and other aspects, and accept the guidance, supervision and inspection from local governments.

...

Religious staffers recognized by religious groups are allowed to conduct religious activities after filing a record with religious departments of local governments above county level. (China 7 Sept. 2017)

According to the US CECC report, many religious groups refuse to have their members of the clergy registered "because registration requires submitting to the direction of a state-sanctioned patriotic religious association" (US 8 Oct. 2018, 123). According to the UK Home Office, registered religious groups "are required to adapt their practices and doctrines to conform to traditional Chinese culture and values, a process of 'sinicization' [2] of religion" and the activities and personal freedom of religious believers are "restrict[ed]" when authorities perceive these to be a threat to the interests of the state or the CCP (UK July 2021, para. 2.4.5).

Sources report that the Holy See [Vatican City] and China have signed an accord (Freedom House 3 Mar. 2021, Sec. D2; Reuters 30 Dec. 2020), giving Chinese authorities leverage over the appointment of bishops (Reuters 30 Dec. 2020; Freedom House 3 Mar. 2021, Sec. D2). Reuters reports that according to the terms of the 2018 accord, the final decision to appoint bishops rests with the Pope, but the Chinese government can propose candidates; however, the same source adds that the exact terms of the accord remain confidential (Reuters 30 Dec. 2020). According to the same source, citing Vatican officials, the agreement was meant to apply to mainland China only, due to Hong Kong's "semi-autonomous status," but the Chinese government "is seeking to apply [it] to Hong Kong" by intervening in the nomination of the city's next bishop (Reuters 30 Dec. 2020).

The Professor indicated that the "drastic enforcement and massive reversal of what had been in the past a flexible implementation of [religious] policy" has led to even official churches being shuttered in both rural and urban areas (Professor 10 Sept. 2021). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Asia Team of CSW, an NGO based in the UK that advocates for religious freedom rights and protections in 20 countries across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America (CSW n.d.), similarly stated, citing their conversation with a Christian legal expert, that what had previously been religious

rules that "were not strictly enforced" before the 2018 regulations have since turned into a "push" for Christians "to only have religious activities at designated sites" (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021). CSW's Asia Team noted that while the contents of the regulations are significant, "the subsequent escalation in religious oppression" surpasses the text itself (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a research fellow at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore who has published a book on Christianity in China and conducted fieldwork in Southern China from 2014 to 2019, observed that the "trend towards more crackdowns" already existed prior to the implementation of the 2018 regulations; the 2018 regulations put into writing "what was already happening and intended to [be] applied more systematically" (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021). Sources note that the government has been "target[ing]" sectors of Chinese civil society and industry, from banking to the technology and film industries (Professor 10 Sept. 2021; Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021) and that the 2018 regulations can be understood as part of a "larger consolidation of authority and centralization of power undertaken by the CCP in the last few years" (Professor 10 Sept. 2021) or a "broader desire that President Xi Jinping has had to bring [these sectors] under his control" (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021).

2.2 2020 Measures on the Administration of Religious Groups

According to the US CECC report, the Measures on the Administration of Religious Groups, implemented in February 2020, contains "a set of 41 articles that emphasizes the role of the government and Party in controlling the government-affiliated religious associations that manage the five officially registered religions recognized by the government" and "supplement" the 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs (US 12 Jan. 2021, 111). Sources report that the new regulatory measures further restrict the management of religious organizations and require

religious groups to support CCP leadership (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021; US 12 Jan. 2021, 111–112) and spread CCP ideology (CFR 25 Sept. 2020; US 12 Jan. 2021, 111–112).

3. Treatment by Authorities

Sources report that since the implementation of the 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs, Chinese authorities have increased crackdowns on unregistered religious groups (UCAN 20 July 2021; Amnesty International 30 Dec. 2019). The ChinaAid Association (ChinaAid), a US-based "international non-profit Christian human rights organization committed to promoting religious freedom and the rule of law in China" (ChinaAid n.d.), states in its 2019 annual report on the treatment of Christians in China that "authorities have continued to carry out the central government's orders to force religion to place the Chinese government's ideals at its center, and officials arrest those who resist" (ChinaAid 28 Feb. 2020, 37). Amnesty International adds that "[a]uthorities have removed crosses and Christian slogans from church buildings, confiscated or vandalized church properties, ordered churches to close and questioned church leaders and members" (Amnesty International 30 Dec. 2019).

3.1 Christian Branches and Denominations

According to the CSW Asia Team, "there are differences in the treatment of Christians depending on the type of church they attend" (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021). Similarly, the Research Fellow added that the situation of Catholics and Protestants is "very diverse," especially with regards to "so-called unofficial or underground [or house church] Catholics and Protestants" (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021). In contrast, the Professor stated that the authorities treat Christians from various branches and denominations "similarly" and that differences in treatment come from whether the religious organization is an official church, a house church, or an underground church (Professor 10 Sept. 2021).

3.1.1 Catholics

According to the Research Fellow, "officially," the situation of Catholics "has been improving," with variations from region to region, as the Holy See has been "emphatically encouraging" Chinese Catholics to register and cooperate with the state (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021). The Associated Press (AP) reports that the Holy See encouraged clergy in China to register with the Chinese government while also declaring that they "remain 'faithful to the principles of Catholic doctrine'" (AP 28 June 2019). The Research Fellow noted that despite this, there are still cases of Catholic priests who are shot, detained or "disappear for a few weeks or more" for the purpose of "re-education" at the hands of the authorities (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021). Similarly, the CSW Asia Team stated that Catholic clergy not registered with the state "continue to be arbitrarily detained or placed under house arrest," despite the signing of a provisional agreement on the appointment of bishops between the Holy See and the Chinese government in 2018 (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021).

According to Freedom House, while the Holy See–China agreement reportedly allows the Holy See to veto nominations made by the Chinese government, existing bishops recognized by the Holy See and not by the Chinese state continue to grapple with an "unclear" fate, as complaints of "intimidation and pressure [placed on the clergy] to sign registration forms" persist (Freedom House 3 Mar. 2021, Sec. D2). AsiaNews reports that the agreement between the foreign ministry of China and the Holy See "has no impact on the management of the Church [in China]" which falls under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and that agreement "does not lead to any consequences or freedom for local communities"; since its signing, there has been an increase in "bishops under house arrest" and "bishops subjected to political sessions" notably in "unofficial [Catholic] communities" (AsiaNews 24 May 2021). The US CECC further adds that unregistered or "'underground'" Catholic clergy

face "pressure tactics, detention, surveillance, and removal from their churches and duties" (US 12 Jan. 2021, 108). An article by the Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN), a Catholic media service based in Asia (UCAN n.d.), reports that the 2020 Measures on the Administration of Religious Group direct that "Catholic bishops must be approved and ordained by the state-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference" (UCAN 20 July 2021).

Senior members of the diocese in Hong Kong, the Holy See's only diplomatic representation of its kind in China, told Reuters that China has sought to "extend its control over the diocese, in part by influencing the choice of the city's next bishop" (Reuters 30 Dec. 2020). The same source also indicates that the Catholic church in Hong Kong, numbering an estimated 400,000 members in a city of 7.5 million, is the "latest major institution here to feel squeezed by Beijing" following the "weaken[ing], co-opt[ing] or cow[ing]" of Hong Kong's judiciary, police force, and democracy movement (Reuters 30 Dec. 2020). According to AsiaNews, the Catholic bishop of Xinxiang in Henan province, recognized by the Holy See but not by Chinese authorities, as well as a number of priests and seminarians were arrested in May 2021 (AsiaNews 15 July 2021). The same source further reports that the detainees, who have since been released with the exception of the bishop, were allegedly "brainwashed" during "political sessions" by the authorities for the purpose of "inculcat[ing]" CCP principles on religious freedoms (AsiaNews 15 July 2021). In a case reported by Reuters, two Catholic nuns employed at the Holy See's "unofficial" diplomatic mission in Hong Kong were arrested in Hebei province in May 2020 and were placed under house arrest and prohibited from leaving mainland China (Reuters 30 Dec. 2020).

3.1.2 Protestants

CSW's Asia Team stated that Protestant house churches, which often "do not own physical property, are forcibly disbanded" when authorities "put pressure" on landlords to not provide their spaces for house church services, as was the case for the Guiyang Living Stone Church [in Guizhou province], and this tactic has been "more frequently applied" since 2018 (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021). Similarly, Australia's DFAT indicates that government authorities are "cutting power and water or restricting rental space" to religious groups to pressure them to comply with religious regulations (Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.46).

According to sources, Guiyang Living Stone Church's place of worship was shut down in 2015 (ChinaAid 25 May 2021; China Change 21 Dec. 2015). In an interview of Guiyang Living Stone Church members published in December of 2015 by China Change, an online news organization that reports on human rights, the rule of law, and civil society in China (China Change n.d.), it was reported that the District City Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau of Nanming had issued a "Rectification Order" against the church in November 2015 stating "illegal" usage of the commercial space for religious purposes and giving the church three days to regularize their permits while incurring daily financial penalties, effectively keeping the church "from operating" and "preventing [members] from congregating" (China Change 21 Dec. 2015). Sources note that the pastor of Guiyang Living Stone Church was arrested [in 2016 (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021)] and released in 2018 (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021; ChinaAid 25 May 2021); since his release, the pastor continues to face "scrutiny" (ChinaAid 25 May 2021) or "harassment" (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 201). According to the CSW Asia Team, the pastor was "attacked and beaten by a government official in a police station in Guiyang" in May 2021 (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021).

In April 2018, sources report that the Zion Church in Beijing, one of the city's largest Protestant house churches, had their lease terminated by their landlord (Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.46; Bitter Winter 15 Sept. 2018). According to Australia's DFAT, their members were "harassed" by local and state security forces after the house church refused to comply with a state order to install 24 CCTV [closed-circuit television] cameras in their facilities (Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.46). According to *Palladium*, a "non-partisan," non-profit magazine publication that focuses on long-form analysis and investigative journalism of international events (*Palladium* n.d.), Zion Church also had its electricity and water cut off following the government crackdown, and the house church "ceased operation shortly after, as have many other churches targeted since 2018" (*Palladium* 19 Aug. 2019).

According to sources, while Protestant house churches are not officially recognized by the state, many are able to operate as long as they strike "a careful balance: operating outside the CCP's religious framework, while trying to avoid charges that they serve as vectors for Western influence" (*Palladium* 19 Aug. 2019), or they are "careful, [and] they hide," despite the likelihood that the authorities are aware of their existence, as "they often let them be" if they "keep quiet and keep a low profile" (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021). According to the Research Fellow, at the request of the official protestant church in China, the state has interfered in the affairs of a branch of the True Jesus Church in Nanping, Fujian province, whereby the True Jesus Church lost its status as an official Protestant church due to theological differences (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021). The same source noted that the True Jesus Church complied with the investigation of a high-level official Protestant church pastor, conducted on behalf of the state, to regain a favourable relationship with the State (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021).

In another case reported by sources, a pastor of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu [in Sichuan province] was arrested in December 2018 and sentenced to nine years in prison in 2019 for

"inciting [subversion of] state power" (Amnesty International 30 Dec. 2019; CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021; *Time* 2 Jan. 2020). According to ChinaAid, members of his family have been subject to varying degrees of mistreatment, from "[torture] during detention," to the violation of their rights to visit the imprisoned leader (ChinaAid 28 Feb. 2020, 42), "[verbal] abuse" and the freezing of bank accounts of detained members' families (ChinaAid 28 Feb. 2020, 42). According to the CSW Asia Team, over 100 church members were also detained (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021). In contrast, Radio Free Asia (RFA), "a private, nonprofit corporation, funded through the US Agency for Global Media, an independent federal government agency" (RFA n.d.), indicates that "dozens" of church members were detained and placed under house arrest (RFA 18 June 2021).

3.1.3 Other Christian Groups

Sources report that several religious groups have been "subject to regular government crackdowns" (CFR 25 Sept. 2020) or "have reported increased repression since ... 2018" (*Time* 2 Jan. 2020). Australia's DFAT states that the CCP does not trust organizations the state does not control, including Christian branches or denominations such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and that "government sensitivity towards foreign influence" would impact these groups' ability to practice their religion (Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.115). The same source notes that Chinese Jehovah's Witnesses have reportedly faced "increased nationwide religious persecution since May 2018," notably in Zhejiang, Guangzhou, Qingdao, Xinjiang, Nanjing, Tibet, Chongqing, Zhuhai, Shangxi, and Dali (Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.116).

For information on groups defined as cults [*xie jiao*, *xiejiao*], and particularly the Church of Almighty God (CAG), including its leaders, location and activities, as well as the treatment of its members by

authorities, see Response to Information Request CHN200597 of October 2021.

3.2 Leaders and Members

Sources noted that the authorities treat house church leaders differently from house church members (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021; Lecturer 17 Sept. 2021; Professor 10 Sept. 2021), the leaders being treated more "harsh[ly]" than lay members (Lecturer 17 Sept. 2021; Professor 10 Sept. 2021). The Professor explained that this represents "a strategy to try to win over the vast majority of people and isolate those with greater responsibility, and to make a public example out of them" (Professor 10 Sept. 2021). According to the CSW Asia Team, Protestant house church leaders face "arbitrary arrest, detention and imprisonment, as well as physical attacks, harassment and intimidation against both leaders and their family members," and "ordinary" church members are also "seriously impacted" by "the authorities' treatment of the church" (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021). The same source noted that Early Rain Church members in Chengdu have faced "intrusive surveillance, police harassment, forced eviction and arbitrary detention" (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021).

Australia's DFAT states that "Christian 'cult' organizations," are targeted for "crackdowns" by authorities in order to "identify and punish the leaders, with disciples viewed as victims" (Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.114). Sources report that during a crackdown on Shouwang Church in Beijing [in March 2019, "one of Beijing's largest [unregistered] Protestant congregations" (AsiaNews 27 Mar. 2019)], the pastor was charged with violating regulations while members were questioned (AsiaNews 27 Mar. 2019; Lecturer 17 Sept. 2021). According to Yang, the Shouwang Church's founding pastor has been living under "de facto house arrest since 2011" (*Christianity Today* 31 Dec. 2019).

3.3 Geographic and Demographic Differences

According to Freedom House, religious groups' ability to practice their beliefs "varies dramatically based on religious affiliation, location, and registration status" (Freedom House 3 Mar. 2021, Sec. D2). Similarly, Australia's DFAT states that unregistered Christian churches face restrictions that "vary widely according to local conditions," effectively making it "difficult to form general conclusions" (Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.44). According to the Research Fellow, a common strategy used by the CCP is to "pick on" a particular house church in a given region and to hold it as an example for all unregistered house churches across the country to "self-behave and self-regulate," making it difficult to monitor which region is more "under the radar" for government crackdowns at one point in time or another (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021).

The Research Fellow stated that in terms of differences in treatment across rural areas compared with urban areas, "authorities will often turn a blind eye on house church activities" in rural areas and that "mostly [elderly] people live there," while cities are more dynamic as there is both "more cover and it is easier to slip into the underground world of churches without attracting attention" and "the authorities there might be less friendly or inclined to give concessions" to religious rule-breakers (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021). Conversely, the Professor stated that in urban areas, authorities "tend to be better read and more nuanced in their application of the religious policies, making them relatively less strict," while in rural areas tolerance for house church activities has diminished since the 2018 regulations were issued (Professor 10 Sept. 2021).

According to the CSW Asia Team, rural churches whose rights are violated by the state "are less likely to be able to find and appoint lawyers to advocate for their rights" (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021). Sources note, however, that whether in urban or rural areas, house churches with

a physical presence, like a rented building or office floor, "have received much harsher treatment from the authorities" (Professor 10 Sept. 2021) or have been shuttered by the state (Research Fellow 3 Sept. 2021). ChinaAid reports in its 2019 annual report that the "majority" of house churches in urban areas gather in smaller groups in private homes, rent public venues only temporarily, and "[c]ongregations of more than 100 believers are hard to find, and most church venues in office buildings have closed" (ChinaAid 28 Feb. 2020, 41). The same source notes, that in rural areas, "most" house church have gone "underground" and are meeting in "a semi-secret manner" (ChinaAid 28 Feb. 2020, 41).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Edinburgh, whose research focuses on society, culture, and Christianity in China, stated that generally, authorities in South and Southeast China are likelier to have "a more relaxed approach" to enforcing religious regulations, with a caveat that tolerance appears to be decreasing particularly in Southern China as "multiple reports of raids on house churches" have emerged (Lecturer 17 Sept. 2021). On the other hand, the same source added that officials in Northern and Northwestern China "adopt less tolerant approaches" (Lecturer 17 Sept. 2021). According to the Professor, treatment of house churches by the authorities in the far West regions, like Xinjiang, Tibet, and other border areas, particularly along the Central Asia borders, is "far harsher," as those regions "tend to be more precarious politically ... and house churches are under serious pressure under the security surveillance apparatus already in place there due to the presence of other ethnic/religious minority groups" (Professor 10 Sept. 2021). The same source stated that in coastal areas, the "pressure" placed by authorities on house churches "is less intense" (Professor 10 Sept. 2021). ChinaAid states that churches facing demolition or that have already been demolished in 2019 were located in the provinces of Shaanxi, Hubei, Inner Mongolia, Jiangxi, Tianjin, Anhui, Hebei, Henan, and Jiangsu (ChinaAid 28 Feb. 2020, 40). The same source notes that

church crosses were also demolished in the provinces of Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Henan, Hubei, Shandong, and Guizhou (ChinaAid 28 Feb. 2020, 40). Yang indicates that since the 2018 regulations were passed, authorities have "implemented the fiercest campaign against [house] churches since the 1980s," shuttering "well-known [house] churches, including Rongguili Church in Guangzhou, Xunsiding Church in Xiamen, and some in other large cities" over the course of 2019 (*Christianity Today* 31 Dec. 2019).

4. Access to Legal Remedy

Sources report that the "709 Crackdown," a 2015 Chinese public security operation targeting human rights lawyers and their associates who defended religious freedom cases, among other sensitive issues, is still ongoing, and such lawyers are still being targeted by the state (*The Diplomat* 9 July 2021; US 9 July 2020). The *Diplomat*, a current affairs magazine focused on events in the Asia-Pacific region (*The Diplomat* n.d.), notes that the Chinese government applies administrative pressure against defense lawyers who are not "pliant" enough, "especially in 'sensitive' cases in which the government wants to guarantee its preferred outcomes while, at the same time, still displaying a veneer of legality to give its rigged outcome a degree of legitimacy" (*The Diplomat* 9 July 2021). Similarly, a 9 July 2020 US CECC article reports that beyond imprisonment, Chinese officials deploy a variety of administrative means, including disbarment, to target lawyers critical of the Chinese government or lawyers who advocate for targeted groups such as Christians (US 9 July 2020). The same source notes that Chinese authorities have continued to "further institutionalize control over the legal profession by restricting speech and requiring loyalty to the [CCP]" (US 9 July 2020). According to Australia's DFAT, with regards to religious organizations designated by the Chinese authorities as "cults," legal representation is even more challenging for adherents and leaders to obtain due to the associated "stigma," of such groups, and the

knowledge that "lawyers taking on their cases are often themselves targets of adverse attention by authorities" (Australia 3 Oct. 2019, para. 3.114).

In a case reported by sources, a "Christian rights defense lawyer" (ChinaAid 28 Feb. 2020, 29) or advocate for "religious minorities" (ICC 6 Sept. 2020), and director of the Guangxi Baijuming Law Firm in Guangxi province, was detained in October of 2019 and subsequently charged with "subversion of state power" (ChinaAid 28 Feb. 2020, 29; ICC 6 Sept. 2020). According to sources, the arrest lawyer had often criticized Chinese officials online (Front Line Defenders [Aug. 2021]; ICC 6 Sept. 2020). In another case reported by ChinaAid, a "Christian rights" defense lawyer in Beijing was faced with "multiple" lease terminations following "pressure" placed on her landlords by the police (ChinaAid 28 Feb. 2020, 30).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] *Christianity Today* is an evangelical Christian magazine, founded by [American evangelist] Billy Graham, that is "advocat[ing] for the church, shap[ing] the evangelical conversation" and spreading the Christian gospel (*Christianity Today* n.d.).

[2] According to the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) *Annual Report 2020*, "Sinicization" "means 'integrating religious doctrines into Chinese culture,' and guiding religions to adapt to 'Chinese Cultural Traditions'" (US 12 Jan. 2021, 112). According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), to "sinicize" religion is to "shape all religions to conform to the doctrines of the officially atheist [Chinese Communist

Party] and the customs of the majority Han Chinese population" (CFR 25 Sept. 2020). According to a pastor in conversation with the CSW Asia Team, "[s]inicization of religion is in fact the 'partyisation' of religion, and in the end there is only the CCP and no religious beliefs" (CSW Asia Team 22 Sept. 2021).

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