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10 May 2022

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China: Treatment of members of Christian Patriotic Churches, including the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) [Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA)], by the authorities and the Public Security Bureau (PSB); the revised regulation on religious affairs in 2018, including restrictions on Patriotic Churches (2020–April 2022)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

Sources report that the Chinese government officially recognizes the following five religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Taoism [Daoism] (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.22; US 12 May 2021, 1; China 4 Apr. 2018, Sec. III). According to the US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* for China, only religious groups related to one of the five government-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" assigned for each official religion are allowed to register with the state and administer worship services; the state-sanctioned Christian associations are the TSPM and CCPA (US 12 May 2021, 1). In contrast, other sources list seven official religious associations, which includes the TSPM, [China] Christian Council, the CCPA and Bishops' Conference of Catholic Church in China (China 4 Apr. 2018, Sec. II(1); US 12 Jan. 2021, 120–121). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of political science at the University of Ottawa, who has published on religion and politics in China, stated that the role of Patriotic Christian associations in China is to "monitor the activities of Christians under their authority" (Professor of political science 4 Apr. 2022).

A report by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) notes that Christianity is "growing rapidly" in China (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.28). According to a US government estimate, Christians comprise 5.1 percent of China's total population of 1.4 billion (US 12 May 2021, 4). A 2018 Chinese government white paper on religious freedom states that there are 38 million Protestants and 6 million Catholics, as well as 57,000 Protestant clerical personnel and 8,000 Catholic personnel (China 4 Apr. 2018, Sec. III). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* indicates that according to information available on the TSPM website in 2017, there are 20 million Protestants affiliated with the TSPM (US 12 May 2021, 4). The DFAT report notes that "[m]ost" of China's Protestants practice in "unofficial 'house' churches" (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.33). For

information on the treatment of members of house churches, including Protestant, Catholic, and other Christian house churches, by the authorities, see Response to Information Request CHN200760 of October 2021.

The US *International Religious Freedom Report* notes that, based on media and NGO estimates, there are 10 to 12 million Catholics nationwide, "approximately half" of whom are associated with the CCPA (US 12 May 2021, 4–5). In contrast, Australia's DFAT indicates that the ratio of "underground" Catholics to CCPA members is unknown (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.39).

China's 2018 white paper states that there are 60,000 registered Protestant churches and sites of assembly and 6,000 registered Catholic churches and places of assembly across 98 dioceses (China 4 Apr. 2018, Sec. III(1)).

The DFAT report indicates that the TSPM is the "official governing body for Protestant churches" and exists under the authority of the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party of China (CCP) (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.32). A reference book on religions in China by lead author Fenggang Yang, Director of the Center on Religion and the Global East at Purdue University in Indiana (Purdue University n.d.), the Christian Council, which is also Protestant, has become "intertwined [with] and inseparable" from the TSPM (Yang with Pettit 2018, 27, 28).

According to the DFAT report, the CCPA represents the Catholic Church in China but does not recognize the Vatican's authority (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.36). Similarly, the US *International Religious Freedom Report* states that Catholic groups who pledge loyalty to the Holy See are not permitted to register with the Chinese government (US 12 May 2021, 7). The reference book by Yang notes that the relationship

between the CCPA and Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China resembles that of the TSPM and the Christian Council (Yang with Pettit 2018, 39).

In an interview with ChinaSource, a non-profit organization based in California that seeks to provide a platform for "critical issues facing the church and ministries in China" (ChinaSource n.d.), Fenggang Yang stated that various "administrative levels" of state-sanctioned religious associations operate as "separate associations" as opposed to "one association with local branches" (ChinaSource 3 Feb. 2020). Yang added that these "separate committees" must "report to the local party-state" (ChinaSource 3 Feb. 2020).

1.1 Governmental Structure for Religious Oversight

The US *International Religious Freedom Report* states that the CCP creates the regulations governing religion and oversees the United Front Work Department, which itself oversees the operations and responsibilities of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), the body tasked with implementing official religious regulations (US 12 May 2021, 6). The same source indicates that SARA administers the Bureaus of Religious Affairs at the provincial and local levels (US 12 May 2021, 6). In an interview with the Research Directorate, a professor at a university in the US, whose research focuses on Protestants in China and who has conducted fieldwork in the country, indicated that since 2018, when the CCP's United Front Work Department absorbed the Religious Affairs Bureau, the CCP has been more "directly in charge" of religious management (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).

The US *International Religious Freedom Report* indicates that regulations governing religious organizations permit patriotic associations to construct places of worship, train religious leaders, produce literature, and offer social services to surrounding communities (US 12 May 2021, 7). The same source also provides the following information:

According to regulations, religious organizations must submit information about the organization's historical background, members, doctrines, key publications, minimum funding requirements, and government sponsor, which must be one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations. Registration information is only required once, but religious organizations must reregister if changes are made to the required documentation. (US 12 May 2021, 7)

1.2 Sinicization Campaign

Sources state that China is in the midst of a [2019–2024 (US 12 May 2021, 1–2)] campaign to Sinicize religion (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.24; US 12 May 2021, 1–2; ChinaAid 1 Mar. 2022, 39). According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report*, the objective and methods of Sinicization involve

bring[ing] all religious doctrine and practice in line with CCP doctrine, including by requiring clergy of all faiths to attend political indoctrination sessions, monitoring religious services, preapproving sermons, and altering religious texts, including, according to media, stories from the life of Jesus, to emphasize loyalty to the CCP and the State. (US 12 May 2021, 2)

The Professor indicated that Sinicization is the "overarching theme" of how authorities treat registered Christian churches and stated that the "heart" of this effort is "patriotic education, which means loyalty to the CCP" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The Professor of political science indicated that the CCP's Sinicization campaign views religion as "more than a spiritual matter but also a social issue" with the potential to serve as a "channel for foreign interference" (Professor of political science 4 Apr. 2022). The DFAT report notes that this work is overseen by the CCP's United Front Work Department (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.24).

According to Yang in the interview with ChinaSource, the campaign is premised on ensuring "political conformity and obedience" (ChinaSource 3 Feb. 2020). CSW, a Christian NGO based in the UK that advocates for religious freedom rights and protections in 20 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East (CSW n.d.), indicates that religious communities registered with authorities are "subject to increasingly severe restrictions," including "forced" demonstrations of "loyalty" to the CCP (CSW 22 Mar. 2022, 1).

According to the Professor of political science, Protestantism represents the "most important challenge" to the Sinicization campaign because of its "connections with powerful Protestant denominations in the West" (Professor of political science 4 Apr. 2022).

1.3 China's Agreement with the Vatican

Sources report that in 2018 China signed an agreement with the Vatican, subsequently extended for another two years in 2020, under which the Vatican would view ["some Chinese-appointed" (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.37) or "all" China-based (Vatican News 22 Oct. 2020)] Bishops as legitimate (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.37; Vatican News 22 Oct. 2020). The DFAT report adds that the deal entailed that "a number of Vatican-approved bishops" operating "underground" Catholic churches would join the CCPA (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.36, 3.37). Sources state that many of the specifics of the agreement are unknown (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.37) or that the deal has never been published (AP 22 Oct. 2020).

2. The 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs

Sources report that the 2018 [revised (Xinhua News Agency 1 Feb. 2018)] Regulations on Religious Affairs came into effect on 1 February 2018 (US 26 Feb. 2020, 3; Xinhua News Agency 1 Feb. 2018).

A summary of the Regulations on Religious Affairs, published by the State Council of China, states the following:

The establishment, changes and dissolution of religious groups must be registered in accordance with related rules on China's social group management.

Religious groups are entitled to functions that include assisting governments at all levels in the implementation of laws, regulations, rules and policies, protecting the legitimate rights of citizens with religious beliefs, guiding religious affairs, researching religious culture and carrying out religious education and training.

Only national religious groups or province-level religious groups are entitled to establish religious colleges.

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.

...

... [C]ollective religious activities should be held in religious venues, organized by religious groups or schools, presided over by qualified staff members, following religious creed.

...

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

Internet religious services should be approved by religious affairs departments of government above province-level, and follow the national internet service regulations. (China 7 Sept. 2017)

According to the DFAT report, the new regulations and the organizations implementing them seek to "enhance" state "control" over the appointment of various religious leaders, create greater transparency over religious groups' funding sources, restrict religious practice to stateauthorized sites, limit ties to foreign religious organizations, and equip the CCP with greater authority over the doctrine religious groups teach (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.24).

In an interview with the Research Directorate, a research associate at a university in Hong Kong who focuses on Chinese Christianity, stated that the PSB is "one of the more visible" government ministries involved in implementing the regulations, but that this implementation can also involve the Civil Affairs Bureau, the Religious Affairs Bureau, various prosecutorial divisions, or those authorities responsible for regulating fire hazards, usage of land, and commercial transactions (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022).

According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report*, national laws permit provincial-level administrations to establish their own religious affairs regulations and set violation penalties (US 12 May 2021, 9). The same source adds that following the issuance of the 2018 regulations, many provinces updated their own regulations (US 12 May 2021, 9). 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, indicated that since the publication of the 2018 regulations, "some" local governments have released their own "local (provincial)" regulations, which "tend to be more restrictive" (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). In followup correspondence, the same

source added that, for example, Shandong province's regulations on religious affairs, revised in 2019, provide additional restrictions regarding the location of religious statues and images and the distribution of internal church religious materials (Lecturer 4 May 2022). The Research Associate stated that the regulations are being applied as intended but the "strictness" of their enforcement varies across locations (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022).

For information regarding the enforcement of the revised regulation on religious affairs on members of house churches, see Response to Information Request CHN200760 of October 2021.

2.1 Other Regulations for Religious Groups and Activities

Sources stated that since the 2018 regulations, authorities have issued other regulations governing religious affairs (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022; CSW 5 Apr. 2022; Professor of political science 4 Apr. 2022), which includes the introduction in 2018–2019 of a new policy "restricting" minors from accessing religious sites, a requirement for churches to display China's national flag, requirements for churches to "'Sinicize' their religious beliefs and activities" to accord them with "socialism and traditional Chinese values," and a "general trend" in "recent years" of churches being required to "'tone down'" their celebrations of Christmas and Easter (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). According to the Lecturer, these new policies and the 2018 regulations have led to "a tightening of the freedoms of registered churches" (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). The US *International Religious Freedom Report* states that implementation of the regulations governing religious schools and the participation of minors (under age 18) in religious services "varies greatly across and within regions" (US 12 May 2021, 11).

Sources, citing an article by the state-run Xinhua News Agency, report that the 2019 Administrative Measures for Religious Groups came into effect on 1 February 2020 (AsiaNews 31 Dec. 2019; US 26 Feb.

2020). The US *International Religious Freedom Report* indicates that the measures state that religious organizations "must support the leadership of the CCP, adhere to the direction of Sinicization, and implement the values of socialism" (US 12 May 2021, 11). According to Yang, the 2019 administrative measures constitute a "further specification of rules" related to official religious associations (ChinaSource 3 Feb. 2020).

Sources report that on 1 May 2021, new measures regulating religious staff came into effect (CSW 22 Mar. 2022, 1; US 21 Mar. 2022, 93; ChinaAid 1 Mar. 2022, 14), and the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) annual report for 2021 states that they are called the Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel (US 21 Mar. 2022, 93). The same source indicates the following:

The new measures include plans to establish a database of clergy that records their basic information, rewards and punishments, travel for religious work, and religious activities. They require clergy to promote the "sinicization of religion" and to "adhere to the principle of independence and self-management of religion," meaning religious personnel in China must resist "domination" or "infiltration" by "foreign forces," reject unauthorized appointments to leadership positions made by foreign religious groups or institutions, and reject domestic or overseas donations that violate national regulations. (US 21 Mar. 2022, 93)

An article by CSW notes that article 16 of the measures provides that Catholic bishops must be "approved and ordained by the state-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference" (CSW 30 Apr. 2021). In an interview with the Research Directorate, a researcher on CSW's Asia Team indicated that the regulations include term limits of five years on positions of senior leadership in Catholic churches, and applicants must submit "a lot of" personal information to authorities (CSW 5 Apr. 2022). The same source added that it is "quite easy" for a prospective leader to be "disqualified" if their "past record" raises "any kind of suspicion" (CSW 5 Apr. 2022).

According to sources, on 1 March 2022 the Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services came into effect (CSW 22 Mar. 2022, 1; ChinaAid 1 Mar. 2022, 15). Sources report that the measures state that a permit is required to share religious content [or information about religious ceremonies (*SCMP* 23 Dec. 2021)] online (CSW 22 Mar. 2022; ChinaAid 1 Mar. 2022, 15; *SCMP* 23 Dec. 2021). ChinaAid, a US-based non-profit Christian human rights organization focused on religious freedom in China (ChinaAid n.d.), describes the measures as follows:

No organization or individual may teach, conduct religious education and training, publish sermons, repost or link related content, organize religious activities, conduct fundraising in the name of religion, or broadcast or play recorded live religious ceremonies on the internet, including texts, pictures, audio, and video content, live-streamed or recorded religious ceremonies such as worshipping Buddha, burning incense, ordination, chanting, worship, mass, and baptism. (ChinaAid 1 Mar. 2022, 15)

The CSW Asia Team researcher stated that these regulations are "unprecedented" in terms of their "reach," as they include individual SMS messages, such as messages sharing prayers or short video clips (CSW 5 Apr. 2022). The same source noted that because the COVID-19 pandemic has moved "more" religious services online, the "specific mention" of online services in the measures is "really important" (CSW 5 Apr. 2022). The Lecturer similarly indicated that regulations regarding permission for "online religious activities" are used to "restrict religious activities," but noted that their application can vary (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022).

According to sources, these measures were jointly issued by five different governmental departments [1] (CSW 5 Apr. 2022; *SCMP* 23 Dec. 2021; ChinaAid 1 Mar. 2022, 15). The CSW Asia Team researcher indicated that this reflects "more coordination" between different bodies of Chinese authorities, which is becoming "more common" as religious

affairs have "become tied up" with issues of national security (CSW 5 Apr. 2022). The same source stated that it is unclear how the measures will be implemented (CSW 5 Apr. 2022).

The Professor stated that authorities now enforce the regulation prohibiting people under the age of 18 from entering a church, whereas they have been more lenient previously (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The CSW Asia Team researcher noted that TSPM churches are not permitted to "work with children" to the same extent as in the past (CSW 5 Apr. 2022).

3. Treatment of Churches and Church Members by Authorities

The Professor indicated that there has been a "material change" for registered Christian churches since the 2018 regulations came into force (Professor 1 Apr. 2022), and CSW reports that since 2018 registered Protestant and Catholic churches and pastors nationwide have "faced increased harassment, fines, cross removals, confiscation of property and forced closure" (CSW 22 Mar. 2022, 1). The Professor of political science stated that the "pressure" on registered Christian churches "is increasing," with clerics and lay worshipers needing to "demonstrate their patriotism in tangible ways" (Professor of political science 4 Apr. 2022). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the ChinaAid President noted that since 2018, the CCP's Sinicization campaign directed all religious personnel to declare loyalty to "Xi Jinping Thought" [2] and to pledge to make their religion compatible with socialist/communist values; those who refuse are removed or reassigned and "some" have been jailed (ChinaAid 24 Mar. 2022). The Lecturer, however, indicated that the 2018 regulations "[i]n many ways ... have not had additional impacts" on registered churches, with exceptions such as regulations on online religious activities (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022).

The Lecturer stated that treatment of CCPA or TSPM churches is "reasonably good," in that authorities "tend not to interfere" in the "day-to-day running of churches and the lives of church leaders and members," provided they are not "deemed to be violating religious policy" (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). The same source, however, added that treatment varies "across time and place" (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). The Research Associate noted that church members who comply with the regulations do not usually face "trouble" from authorities (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022). The same source added that members who do not follow the regulations will face government intervention, but noted that such interventions used to be "arbitrary" whereas they are now guided by the regulations which clarifies the "red lines" (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022).

The DFAT report provides the following information on interaction between Catholic leaders and members, including of Patriotic Churches, and state authorities:

Most Catholics will follow their local leadership, whether it is Party or Vatican controlled, and so leaders are more likely than congregants to face government attention, but the situation differs from place to place and community to community and many Catholics live in rural areas where local conditions may prevail. (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.40)

The CSW Asia Team researcher stated that authorities generally focus their attention on church leadership and noted that this focus is "quite noticeable" in Catholic churches where "some" leaders including bishops have been required to undergo "'patriotic education'" (CSW 5 Apr. 2022). The same source added that this "amount[s] to arbitrary detention," "harassment, and intimidation," and this treatment is more common for leaders that have "tried to maintain a degree of independence from authorities" (CSW 5 Apr. 2022).

The CSW Asia Team researcher noted that lay members who "regularly oppose" authorities or regulations can "provoke pushback" which can include "violence by authorities" (CSW 5 Apr. 2022). The Professor indicated that church members who are most vocal in opposition to authorities tend to be elderly, and authorities use church leaders to "apply pressure" on these members (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The same source added that in "extreme cases" such critics could be "detained," but that it is usually only church leaders who receive "long-term detention" or a prison sentence (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).

ChinaAid reports that in 2020 authorities asked religious sites in Gansu, Henan, Jiangsu and Jiangxi province to install facial recognition cameras (ChinaAid 22 Apr. 2021, 45). According to an article by Bitter Winter [3], "[a]bout" 200 surveillance cameras with facial recognition capacity were installed in "over" 50 TSPM churches in Poyang county in Jiangxi province between July and September 2020 (Bitter Winter 24 Oct. 2020). The same article cites a police officer as indicating that the cameras "monitor[ed]" believers and sermons (Bitter Winter 24 Oct. 2020).

Sources report that authorities have "threaten[ed]" to deny social assistance benefits to elderly members of registered churches to pressure them to remove religious symbols or texts from their home (Bitter Winter 16 Oct. 2020) or have used the ability to "hold up" benefits to compel elderly church members to sign "pledges" to "abandon their faith" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).

According to a ChinaAid report, in January 2021 the TSPM and Christian Association of Qingdao city, Shandong province issued a "ban" on live broadcasts or later releases of audio or video featuring "preaching" (ChinaAid 5 Feb. 2021).

3.1 Treatment by the PSB

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate professor of law at City University of Hong Kong, who researches law, religion and politics in China and has published research on freedom of religion in China, indicated that the PSB typically "has almost nothing to do" with registered church operations, but "may intervene" in cases of "severe" violation of the revised regulation on religious affairs (Associate Professor of law 4 Apr. 2022). The Lecturer stated that the PSB "may become involved" if churches or members violate religious policy; however, in "recent years," PSB officers have visited registered churches "more frequently" to "ensure" compliance with religious policy (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022).

The Research Associate noted that the 2018 regulations have given the PSB "much clearer parameters of what they can do" with regard to registered churches or church members, and stated that there are "no major differences" in treatment by the PSB from before and after 2018 (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022).

The Lecturer indicated that "at times" PSB officers "may be heavy-handed" in "restricting religious activities," and noted "cases in recent years" in which the PSB "shu[t] down" "'English language church worship meetings' where foreigners have been involved in running them" (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022).

According to the Lecturer, "it is not uncommon" for PSB officials to consult registered church leaders regarding the "beliefs and practices of unregistered [local] religious groups" (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022).

The CSW Asia Team researcher stated that it is common for "several different governmental departments" to act together in implanting or enforcing religious regulations, including the police, the Religious Affairs Bureau, and the PSB in the context of a city (CSW

5 Apr. 2022). The same source added that when church members interact with authorities, they are "ofte[n]" unaware of which governmental structures they are interacting with (CSW 5 Apr. 2022).

3.2 Regional Variation

According to the Lecturer, while it is "difficult to generalize," the areas "nearer to Beijing tend to be more restrictive" than those farther away, and in recent years Zhejiang province "has seen some of the most repressive actions against registered churches" (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). Sources stated that registered Christian churches along China's southeastern coast are generally treated better (Professor 1 Apr. 2022; Associate Professor 23 Mar. 2022). The Lecturer indicated that Fujian province tends to see a more "'liberal' approach" to religious regulation (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). In an interview with the Research Directorate, an associate professor at the Université de Paris Cité, who researches Chinese Protestantism, noted that local governments in coastal cities from Jiangsu province southward to Guangdong province are "relatively" "more open-minded," but that this "flexibility" can lead these churches to "flourish and attract members," which will then draw "more government attention" and authorities will "try to maintain a degree of control over them" (Associate Professor 23 Mar. 2022).

The Professor indicated that churches and church members along China's southeastern coast can "fare better" because of the presence of "Christians who can claim other identities that align with other state goals, including economic development" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). For example, sources describe Christian entrepreneurs in Wenzhou city in Zhejiang province who support their churches financially (Professor 1 Apr. 2022; Bitter Winter 10 Sept. 2020); these entrepreneurs can help protect their church (Professor 1 Apr. 2022) or "maintain some influence" within the congregation (Bitter Winter 10 Sept. 2020). However, Bitter Winter notes that amidst "intensifying crackdowns," state authorities have begun "using their businesses as leverages to pressure and manipulate

them," and identifies one TSPM church near Wenzhou whose cross was removed for a second time after, according to one church member, "officials threatened to fine or shut down" the businesses of the church directors (Bitter Winter 10 Sept. 2020).

The Lecturer noted that with some exceptions, churches in "poorer" areas and provinces can experience "harsher" treatment (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). The Professor stated that churches in rural areas, especially in the interior provinces, face "more difficult" treatment, and noted that authorities "can get away with" more strict treatment because of the "limited" foreign presence there (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).

3.3 Church Closures and Mandated Structural Adjustments

The Lecturer indicated that registered churches are "generally not ... shut down arbitrarily" (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). The same source added that local authorities are involved in supporting churches in obtaining land for constructing new churches, and there "are even times" when they help finance the construction (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). The Professor noted, however, that authorities "at the lowest village level," to the county and city levels and beyond, have been "asked to close official churches and meeting points," and "as many as" one-third of all such sites have been "shut down" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The same source added that this is done to reduce religious "physical spaces" and to minimize the number of lay and ordained church personnel and noted that remaining church personnel have been "required to go through study sessions at government offices" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The Research Associate indicated that there are reports of churches, most of which are located in rural areas including in Anhui, Fujian, Henan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Sichuan provinces, that have been "repurposed, demolished" or have been "forced to return" their land to the government (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022).

Sources indicated that due to a declining rural population, some cases of rural church closure by the authorities are (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022; Professor 1 Apr. 2022) "reasonable" (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022) or "due to market forces" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). According to the Research Associate, authorities sometimes "encourage" two to three churches to merge into a single church due to declining congregation populations or the reconfiguration of a religious administrative district; however, it is also possible that authorities are "us[ing] this opportunity" to "supress" or "reduce" the Christian population in a particular region (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022). The Professor of political science indicated that the demolition of Patriotic Christian Churches were, in some cases, tied to localized land disputes (Professor of political science 4 Apr. 2022).

The US *International Religious Freedom Report* states that from January to July 2020 authorities around the country "shut down" religious sites, including some associated with patriotic religious associations, sometimes citing the COVID-19 pandemic (US 12 May 2021, 2).

Bitter Winter reports that, based on "preliminary data," "over" 100 TSPM and house churches were "shut down" in 2020 in four cities in Anhui province (Bitter Winter 8 Dec. 2020). According to another Bitter Winter article, in May 2020 "at least" 50 TSPM churches in Poyang county were "shut down" as part of a what a "county government employee" said was an official order to "merge the congregations of state-approved Protestant venues in the area and repurpose the left-over churches for other use" (Bitter Winter 25 Nov. 2020). The same article adds that "[n]umerous" TSPM churches were similarly "merged" in Anhui, Henan, Jiangsu, Shandong, and "other provinces" (Bitter Winter 25 Nov. 2020). ChinaAid reports that in June 2020 a government-approved church in Zhengzhou, Henan province was "demolished" by local authorities who had first issued a notice for demolition to the church in June 2013 (ChinaAid 24 June 2020).

According to sources, a campaign to remove crosses from the exterior of registered Christian churches began in Zhejiang province in the mid-2010s and later expanded to multiple provinces (CSW 5 Apr. 2022; Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The DFAT report, which cites unnamed Christian media sources, notes that the campaign has affected both Protestant and Catholic churches (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.30). The CSW Asia Team researcher stated that while crosses have been removed from churches in other provinces, evidence has "not yet" emerged of a campaign as "systematic" as the Zhejiang precedent (CSW 5 Apr. 2022). The same source noted that Henan province also experienced a "big" cross removal campaign (CSW 5 Apr. 2022). The Research Associate stated that the government has enforced public-facing cross removal in Anhui, Fujian, Henan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi and Sichuan provinces more than in other provinces (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022). The same source added that for churches in "very" remote villages in any province, or if a church is located far from a road, authorities "might turn a blind eye" to public-facing crosses (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022).

Bitter Winter reports that in the first half of 2020, crosses were removed from over 900 state-run Protestant churches and venues in Anhui province (Bitter Winter 22 Aug. 2020). Another Bitter Winter article reports that in June 2020 two CCPA churches were "shut down" in Dezhou city, Shandong province, and that crosses, religious symbols and pews were "removed" from a Shandong Catholic church (Bitter Winter 22 Sept. 2020).

3.4 Religious Texts and Teachings in Patriotic Churches

The DFAT report notes that "Bibles are increasingly difficult to obtain and Bible references are censored online. ... Sacred images in churches, such as those of the Virgin Mary, have been replaced with portraits of Xi Jinping in some churches" (Australia 22 Dec. 2021,

para. 3.29). The US *International Religious Freedom Report* states that authorities "restrict[ed] the printing and distribution" of the Bible, "penalized" businesses that treated religious materials, and "censored" online posts which referenced Jesus or the Bible (US 12 May 2021, 2).

According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report*, in April 2020, the TSPM in Fujian province issued a document stating that all churches must display posters "'promoting the core socialist values ... in prominent positions,'" and local authorities "reportedly threatened to close churches" that "refused to help spread government propaganda" (US 12 May 2021, 22).

Bitter Winter reports that the Religious Affairs Bureau in Putian city in Fujian province converted the first floor of a TSPM church into a room featuring 168 posters of Mao Zedong, Xi Jinping, and other Chinese communist leaders as well as books written by Xi and publications about various CCP "revolutionary figures" (Bitter Winter 18 Nov. 2020). The same article adds that since late 2018, "[n]umerous" sites displaying similar materials are being "installed in religious venues" (Bitter Winter 18 Nov. 2020).

4. Worship and Faith Practices

According to the DFAT report, the Sinicization campaign includes "ensur[ing] that a 'correct' version of religion is practised" – one that emphasizes patriotism, the CCP's leadership, and loyalty to the CCP (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.24). The same source adds that these emphases may result in "changing elements of worship such as hymns, clerical attire or architecture to better align with Chinese cultural, aesthetic or political traditions" (Australia 22 Dec. 2021, para. 3.24). The Professor of political science noted that Patriotic Christian Churches must "pledge 'love of the country before love of the religion'" (Professor of political science 4 Apr. 2022). The CSW Team Asia researcher stated that there is a noticeable effort by authorities to "make" Christian Patriotic

Churches demonstrate their "patriotism" by raising the national flag, including patriotic songs during religious ceremonies (particularly in TSPM churches), removing religious scripture from door frames, permitting "authorities' vetting of sermons," and replacing images of religious figures with those of Mao Zedong or Xi Jinping (CSW 5 Apr. 2022). According to Bitter Winter, in September 2020 the Christian Council and the TSPM in Quanzhou, Fujian province "demanded" that all TSPM churches there "integrate" Xi Jinping's "call to curb food waste" into their sermons (Bitter Winter 22 Oct. 2020).

The Professor noted that biblical scriptures have been removed from the inside of registered churches, with "only" the religious regulations remaining (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The Research Associate indicated that since 2018, "more significant" registered churches must incorporate "patriotic elements," which can include Xi Jinping Thought, into their teachings and practices; this includes activities such as referencing patriotic content in their hymns, raising the national flag, and commemorating the anniversary of the founding of the CCP and other national holidays (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022). The Research Associate added that registered churches are also "discouraged" from celebrating Christmas (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022). The Research Associate indicated that, by contrast, underground or house churches "refuse" these practices, which is one of the central reasons why members will not join registered churches (Research Associate 22 Mar. 2022).

The Professor of political science noted that CCP "cadres" monitor religious worship in registered Christian churches (Professor of political science 4 Apr. 2022).

The Lecturer noted that registered churches tend to feature "more formal" worship practices than unregistered churches, but that otherwise the "content or basic building blocks of a worship gathering" are similar and include prayer, preaching from the Bible, and worship through

singing (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). The same source stated that the Sinicization campaign has promoted pastors and church leaders quoting or incorporating classical Chinese texts into their explanations of Christian doctrine, while the campaign does not "generally impact" unregistered churches (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022).

4.1 Protestant Churches

The Lecturer provided the following information:

In terms of Protestant registered churches, most are generally Evangelical in faith and practices. There are localised forms of church music, religious festivals, etc. and there are a relatively small number of registered churches which adhere to Seventh-Day Adventism or other "non-mainline" Protestant groups which practice Saturday Sabbath, foot-washing, etc, but nothing which differs that much in terms of form from Christian tradition outside of China. (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022)

The same source noted that in their Sunday worship services, many churches use the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022). According to the Professor, urban churches tend to be "more text based" and "more intellectual" in their reading of scriptures, whereas smaller, rural churches see "more Pentecostal and charismatic expressions" of faith, offer "more emotive / less rational" content in sermons, and include elements of shamanism such as a church leader being understood to have "spiritual power" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The same source added that as urban populations expand, churches are becoming more grounded in texts and are incorporating "more modernist approaches" to scripture and religious practices (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).

The Professor indicated that compared with house churches, Patriotic Churches are "more rigid" and "impersonal" since they are "much larger in general" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The same source added that this is particularly the case in urban areas, and is somewhat different in smaller areas (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The Professor of

political science stated that some Protestants leave TSPM churches for house churches because there are "too many worshippers and not enough places of worship" (Professor of political science 4 Apr. 2022). The CSW Asia Team researcher indicated that church meetings are larger in size in TSPM churches than house churches (CSW 5 Apr. 2022). The Professor noted that it is common for church members to begin their practice at Patriotic Churches, but eventually leave for house churches because they do not "feel intimacy" or feel positively about the sermons offered, or because there is "good" theological seminary training in house churches which can include online offerings and training administered by invited missionaries (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The same source added that by contrast, theological seminary training in Patriotic Churches is "very weak" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).

The ChinaAid President stated that while house churches recognize Christ as the "head of the church," TSPM churches must "acknowledge" the CCP and Chinese government as the church's "ultimate authority" (ChinaAid 24 Mar. 2022).

The ChinaAid President indicated that TSPM organizations do not permit access to their churches to anyone who is under the age of 18, a student, a civil servant, a military serviceperson, a CCP member, or a Communist Youth League member, whereas house churches have no such restrictions (ChinaAid 24 Mar. 2022).

4.2 Catholic Churches

Information on the worship and practices of registered Catholic churches was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Lecturer indicated that registered Catholic church services function "largely the same" to those outside of China, with the exception that they "generally do not feature" the Pope (Lecturer 1 Apr. 2022).

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] The measures were issued by the National Religious Affairs Administration, the Cyberspace Administration of China, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of State Security (*Global Times* 21 Dec. 2021).

[2] According to the BBC, "Xi Jinping Thought" is the political ideology of the Chinese President comprising fourteen principles emphasizing "[c]ommunist ideals," which has been incorporated into the Constitution in 2018 (BBC 25 Aug. 2021).

[3] Bitter Winter is "an online magazine on religious liberty and human rights in China" published by the Center for Studies in New Religion (CESNUR) (Bitter Winter n.d.). According to its official website, CESNUR is an Italy-based "network of independent but related organizations of scholars in various countries, devoted to promot[ing] scholarly research" on new religious movements (CESNUR n.d.).

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Internet sites, including: Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; Belgium – Commissariat général aux réfugiés et aux apatrides; Bertelsmann Stiftung; Catholic News Service; CBC; Chinese Human Rights

Defenders; CNN; *The Diplomat*; The Dui Hua Foundation; ecoi.net; EU – EU Agency for Asylum; Factiva; *Financial Times*; *Foreign Policy*; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; Freedom House; *The Guardian*; Human Rights Watch; *The New York Times*; Radio Free Asia; Religious Freedom Institute; Reuters; Safeguard Defenders; Switzerland – State Secretariat for Migration; UK – Home Office; UN – Refworld; Voice of America; *The Washington Post*.

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