



**Australian Government**  
**Migration Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## China

China – CHN39120 – Local Church –  
Chengdu – Sichuan – Treatment – Jasmine  
Revolution – Crackdown – 2008 Sichuan  
Earthquake  
9 August 2011

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**1. What is the reported attitude of the authorities in Chengdu and/or Sichuan to family/house churches and in particular, to junior and non-proselytising members of those churches?**

As is the case throughout much of the People's Republic of China (PRC), authorities in Sichuan have long maintained an aggressive policy towards groups that it labels 'evil cults'. The primary target of authorities in Sichuan province has been Falun Gong. However, in recent years a number of unregistered Protestant groups were targeted for harassment or complete closure, including so-called 'house churches'. Nevertheless, sources present a complex picture of the relationship between house churches, church leaders, and authorities, characterised by periods of tolerance or indifference by authorities. Sources also indicate that when authorities do target particular house churches, it is generally their leaders who are detained and punished. There is no evidence that normal attendees of house churches in Chengdu/Sichuan are targeted by authorities simply for being members of house churches.

### Chengdu

In October 2008, the Chengdu Municipal People's Congress reported that local authorities had banned 161 house churches in the city. The Congress also reported that authorities had "successfully transformed" members of four Protestant 'cult organizations'.<sup>1</sup> It is possible, however, that this banning was linked to a crackdown on institutions that criticised the state's handling of the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake.<sup>2</sup> See [Sichuan](#) for more details.

In April 2009, "security agents forcibly shut down an Easter gathering of more than 1,000 unregistered Protestants" in Chengdu. Despite the size of the congregation, only six organisers of the gathering were detained by authorities.<sup>3</sup>

In June 2009, the leader of the Autumn Rain Church in Chengdu, Wang Yi, attempted to "hold prayer meetings in memory of the Tiananmen crackdown". However, instead of arresting Wang, municipal authorities reportedly closed the church for breaches of fire safety. The intention, it seems, was not to permanently close the church, but to keep it shut for the duration of the anniversary period while the fire prevention system of the church was overhauled.<sup>4</sup> However, a few weeks later, on 21 June 2009, "law enforcement officers"

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<sup>1</sup> Congressional-Executive Commission On China 2009, *Annual Report*, 10 October, p.137 – Attachment 1

<sup>2</sup> Congressional-Executive Commission On China 2009, *Annual Report*, 10 October, p.27, p.47, p.114 – Attachment 1

<sup>3</sup> Congressional-Executive Commission On China 2009, *Annual Report*, 10 October, p.137 – Attachment 1

<sup>4</sup> Sun, Y. 2010, 'Religions In Sociopolitical Context: The Reconfiguration Of Religious Ecology In Post-Mao China', The University Of Chicago, August, p.154 – Attachment 2

entered a hotel where Autumn Rain members were meeting, “stopped the gathering, and read a notice abolishing Autumn Rain Church as an ‘unregistered social organization’.” According to the China Aid Association (aka ChinaAid), church members attempted to relocate to “the riverside” to complete their meeting; however authorities deployed “approximately 100 riot police officers, plainclothes officers and law enforcement people”.<sup>5</sup> The Autumn Rain Church reportedly appealed to authorities to lift the ban. Recent sources indicate that this appeal was met with a degree of success; in May 2011, it was reported that Wang Yi and “pastors and preachers of dozens of house churches” signed a petition to the National People’s Congress “seeking a resolution of the church-state conflict and a guarantee of religious freedom”.<sup>6</sup> In April 2011, Wang reported that his church “was able to worship unhindered on Easter”.<sup>7</sup>

## Sichuan

The largest crackdowns on ‘house churches’ in provincial Sichuan occurred in the months following the May 2008 earthquake. In the aftermath of the earthquake, a large number of religious congregations from across China collected and distributed aid to earthquake victims in the most severely affected counties. A number of unregistered churches were reportedly met with “official sanction”, particularly underground Protestant groups. In November 2008, it was reported that the ‘Chinese House Church Alliance’ was targeted for conducting earthquake relief without official registration as a social organisation. The following month, public security bureau (PSB) officers arrested members of house churches volunteering in villages in the severely earthquake-affected Beichuan County. The Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) reported in 2009 that a member of a registered church, Zhang Xiuzhi, was arrested after he “inquired about official mishandling of earthquake relief donations”. According to the CECC, Zhang was “ordered to serve one year of reeducation through labor in April for ‘disturbing social order’.” In June 2009, authorities in Nanbu county of Sichuan province arrested and detained house church members Wei Sanhong and Wu Han “in apparent connection with their earthquake disaster relief activities through their church.”<sup>8</sup>

On 11 March 2011, security officials in Qu County in Sichuan province arrested Ms Liao Zhongxiu, leader of the Youqing house church “on charges of ‘suspicion of utilizing a cult organization in undermining the implementation of the state law and regulations’.” According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), this was the second raid on Ms. Liao’s church in less than 12 months. In September 2010, Ms. Liao’s church was raided, property was destroyed, and Liao was subject to a fine. As of May 2011, Ms. Liao remained in custody.<sup>9</sup> A ChinaAid report suggests that Ms Liao was targeted in the second raid, after encouraging local church members to hire legal professionals to defend the rights of the church. ChinaAid also reports that ordinary members of the congregation were

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Autumn Rain Church Files for Administrative Reconsideration’ 2009, ChinaAid, 2 July [http://chinaaidtemp.29.ncol.ca/qry/page.taf?id=105&\\_function=detail&sbtblct\\_uid1=1236&\\_nc=6bb5de8eb352efb106dfcced55ceae85](http://chinaaidtemp.29.ncol.ca/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1236&_nc=6bb5de8eb352efb106dfcced55ceae85) – Accessed 5 August 2011 – Attachment 3

<sup>6</sup> ‘House Church Alliance Leader in China Sentenced to Labor Camp’ 2011, The Christian Post, source: Compass Direct News, 2 August <http://m.christianpost.com/news/house-church-alliance-leader-in-china-sentenced-to-labor-camp-53239/> – Accessed 5 August 2011 – Attachment 4

<sup>7</sup> Blanchard, B. & Buckley, C. 2011, ‘China detains Christians at banned Easter service’, *MSNBC*, source: *Reuters*, 24 April [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42737024/ns/world\\_news-asia\\_pacific/t/china-detains-christians-banned-easter-service/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42737024/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/t/china-detains-christians-banned-easter-service/) – Accessed 5 August 2011 – Attachment 5

<sup>8</sup> Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009, *Annual Report*, 10 October, p.114 – Attachment 1

<sup>9</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2011, *Annual Report*, May, p.130 – Attachment 6

also arrested and detained for fifteen days following the first raid, resulting in family members being forced to pay fines in order to secure their release.<sup>10 11</sup>

In March 2010, the house church of Gan Yonggui in Hongshi village of An County, Sichuan was closed by authorities. The notice provided to the church by the Anxian Bureau of Ethnicity and Religious Affairs states that the church has the right to appeal the decision within 15 days of being notified, which it duly did. No reports have been located that indicate that violence accompanied the notification, or that local attendees were targeted for harm.<sup>12</sup>

## **2. Are there any reports suggesting that attitudes towards family/house churches have hardened since the pro-democracy protests in China in February 2011?**

Members should note that as of August 2011, China has not experienced any significant “pro-democracy protests” following the commencement of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ in the Middle East.<sup>13</sup> An unknown number of political activists have attempted to use the events in the Middle East to inspire a ‘Jasmine Revolution’; however the only public events have been a series of ‘Jasmine Strolls’, whereby people show their support by walking past McDonalds restaurants in several cities.<sup>14</sup> Most of the strolls reportedly attracted far more onlookers than actual participants.<sup>15</sup> In the words of Edward S. Steinfeld in the *Boston Review*, “the Jasmine Revolution drew small crowds and little energy. The dominant story soon became one of unyielding political repression and conspicuous public silence.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite the failure of the Jasmine Revolution to gain any real momentum, the Communist Party of China (CPC) appears to be deeply concerned that wide-spread anger of official corruption in China may catalyse into a popular revolt and subsequent popular movement demanding reform. Consequently, a well-documented crackdown on individuals and some groups continues to take place in the PRC in 2011; the most famous example being the arrest and detention of Ai Wei Wei on ‘tax avoidance’ charges. In some parts of China, this has also translated into a crackdown on popular ‘house churches’, most notably the Shouwang church in Beijing.<sup>17</sup>

There is no evidence of a counter-Jasmine Revolution crackdown on house churches in Sichuan in 2011. However, a number of house church activists from Chengdu travelled to

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Liao Zhongxiu, leader of a house church in Qu County, Sichuan, is arrested’ 2011, China Aid Association website, 11 March <http://www.chinaaid.org/2011/03/liao-zhongxiu-leader-of-house-church-in.html> – Accessed 8 August 2011 – Attachment 7

<sup>11</sup> ‘House-church leader in Qu County, Sichuan, arrested’ 2011, Voice of the Martyrs Canada, 14 March <http://vomcblog.blogspot.com/2011/03/house-church-leader-in-qu-county.html> – Accessed 8 August 2011 – Attachment 8

<sup>12</sup> ‘An County Church Banned in Former Sichuan Earthquake Disaster Zone’ 2010, ChinaAid, 3 March <http://www.chinaaid.org/2010/03/county-church-banned-in-former-sichuan.html> – Accessed 8 August 2011 – Attachment 9

<sup>13</sup> Mu, C. 2011, ‘Why Jasmine Died in China’, *The Diplomat*, 14 July <http://the-diplomat.com/china-power/2011/07/14/why-jasmine-died-in-china/> – Accessed 8 August 2011 – Attachment 10

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International 2011, ‘China’s ‘Jasmine’ Activists’, AI website, 5 May <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/china%E2%80%99s-jasmine-activists-2011-05-05> – Accessed 5 August 2011 – Attachment 11

<sup>15</sup> Mu, C. 2011, ‘Why Jasmine Died in China’, *The Diplomat*, 14 July <http://the-diplomat.com/china-power/2011/07/14/why-jasmine-died-in-china/> – Accessed 8 August 2011 – Attachment 10

<sup>16</sup> Steinfeld, E.S. 2011, ‘China’s Other Revolution’, *Boston Review*, July/August [http://www.bostonreview.net/BR36.4/ndf\\_edward\\_s\\_steinfeld\\_china.php](http://www.bostonreview.net/BR36.4/ndf_edward_s_steinfeld_china.php) – Accessed 5 August 2011 – Attachment 12

<sup>17</sup> ‘House Church Alliance Leader in China Sentenced to Labor Camp’ 2011, The Christian Post, source: Compass Direct News, 2 August <http://m.christianpost.com/news/house-church-alliance-leader-in-china-sentenced-to-labor-camp-53239/> – Accessed 5 August 2011 – Attachment 4

Beijing to protest the closure of Shouwang and, according to Amnesty International, “unfurl banners on Tiananmen Square.” Most of these petitioners and protesters were arrested and returned to Chengdu. Some of them were beaten; four remained missing days later, most likely in PSB custody.<sup>18</sup>

*Reuters* reports that Zhang Mingxuan, a Beijing pastor who is president of the Chinese House Church Alliance was arrested at Easter. Officials also prevented Easter services by two large house churches in Guangzhou. However, it is the view of Wang Yi, pastor of the Autumn Rain Church in Chengdu, that these people and places were targeted because they have become too big for authorities. Wang Yi’s own church, Autumn Rain Church, was allowed to conduct Easter services.<sup>19</sup>

A number of Sichuan-based democracy activists have been arrested and detained in 2011, including Ding Mao from Mianyang and Li Shuangde from Chengdu. Li was officially detained on charges of “credit card fraud”.<sup>20</sup> Another Chengdu resident and blogger, Ran Yunfei, remains in detention at the time of writing on charges of “inciting subversion of state power”.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Shao, J. 2011, ‘China Human Rights Briefing’, Amnesty International website, 7 July

[http://blogs.amnesty.org.uk/blogs\\_entry.asp?eid=7828](http://blogs.amnesty.org.uk/blogs_entry.asp?eid=7828) – Accessed 5 August 2011 – Attachment 13

<sup>19</sup> Blanchard, B. & Buckley, C. 2011, ‘China detains Christians at banned Easter service’, *MSNBC*, source: *Reuters*, 24 April [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42737024/ns/world\\_news-asia\\_pacific/t/china-detains-christians-banned-easter-service/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42737024/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/t/china-detains-christians-banned-easter-service/) – Accessed 5 August 2011 – Attachment 5

<sup>20</sup> Chinese Human Rights Defenders 2011, ‘China Human Rights Briefing Weekly April 6-12’, 16 April – Attachment 14

<sup>21</sup> Amnesty International 2011, ‘China’s ‘Jasmine’ Activists’, AI website, 5 May <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/china%E2%80%99s-jasmine-activists-2011-05-05> – Accessed 5 August 2011 – Attachment 11

## Attachments

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