

Chinese Agent Who Tried to Bribe IRS Against Shen Yun Sentenced to 20 Months in Prison

Prosecutors said the man, a naturalized U.S. citizen, has used freedoms he enjoys in America to undermine the country.

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U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York in White Plains on Nov. 19, 2024. Cara Ding/The Epoch Times



By [Eva Fu](#) and [Cara Ding](#)

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WHITE PLAINS, N.Y.—A Chinese agent who tried to bribe the IRS and manipulate the agency into advancing Beijing’s transnational repression against a U.S. nonprofit has received a 20-month prison sentence.

U.S. citizen John Chen, 72, was a principal actor in a \$50,000 bribery scheme under the direction of a Chinese intelligence official to revoke the nonprofit status of New York-based Shen Yun Performing Arts.

Shen Yun has long been on the Chinese regime’s target list. Founded in 2006, the company tours around the world each year to display the ancient Chinese culture that prevailed before the communist takeover of China, while highlighting the human rights abuses under the regime’s rule. It has often drawn attention to the ongoing persecution of the meditation group Falun Gong.

Chen [pleaded guilty in July](#) after reaching a plea deal with prosecutors. He has spent the past 16 months in detention since his [arrest in May 2023](#), and he will spend another four months in federal custody.

He will also forfeit \$50,000 and face three years of supervised release after serving the full prison term.

For several months in 2023, Chen had been trying to move a fraudulent whistleblower complaint to help the Chinese Communist Party “topple” Falun Gong, according to court documents. Prosecutors said the whistleblower complaint was “facially deficient” and invoked propaganda rhetoric typical of Chinese authorities.

During those conversations, Chen emphasized that Chinese leadership was “very generous” in financial support for the plan, according to the court filing. “After this-this-this thing is done,” the court document

quoted Chen as saying, “reward for work will surely be given at that time.”

Chen and another co-conspirator, Lin Feng, who [served 16 months](#) of detention, paid \$5,000 cash bribes to an undercover agent posing as an IRS agent. They promised an additional \$50,000 for opening an investigation along with 60 percent of any awards from the complaint if it went through.

It was “a significant bribe,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Lockard said at the sentencing hearing. He noted that the undercover officer didn’t specify an amount.



John Chen attends a pro-Beijing event that he organized at the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse in California, in October 2016. Chen and Lin Feng are the two men who tried to bribe an IRS officer into investigating Shen Yun. (Liu Fei/The Epoch Times).

“The defendant chose the amount,” he said.

Both Chen and Lin had traveled to Orange County in upstate New York, where Shen Yun is based, to surveil Falun Gong practitioners there, according to a court filing.

Damian Williams, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, said the sentencing was a reminder that “the U.S. justice system will hold accountable those who attempt to engage in malicious transnational repression on American soil.”

“John Chen aligned himself with the PRC government and its goals to harass and intimidate the Falun Gong, a long-standing target of PRC repression. In doing so, Chen boldly attempted to bribe an individual he believed to be an IRS agent to corrupt the administration of the U.S. tax code and pervert the IRS whistleblower program,” he said in a [statement](#) on Nov. 19. “This Office will not tolerate efforts like this to repress free speech by targeting critics of the PRC in the United States.”



United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York Damian Williams addresses the media in New York City on Nov. 2, 2023. David Dee Delgado/Getty Images

Both Chen’s son and his lawyer declined to comment after walking out of the courtroom.

While Chen’s son, three China-based siblings, two ex-wives, and fiancée have all written letters asking for leniency and describing him as a man who loves America, the prosecutors disagree.

In a Nov. 5 memo, they argued that 30-month imprisonment is appropriate because of the seriousness of the case and the need to deter criminal conduct, “particularly in cases of a foreign power’s repression of a disfavored group within the borders of the United States.”

“The defendant has no mitigating motives or external factors justifying his offense,” the prosecutors wrote, noting that Chen was “not motivated by poverty, he did not suffer from a troubled upbringing,” and that there was no evidence of Chinese officials’ pressure.



The curtain call for Shen Yun Performing Arts at the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center in New York on Jan 11, 2015. Larry Dai/Epoch Times

Prosecutors noted that Chen had repeatedly referred to Chinese officials as his “friends” and that during the bribery scheme, he “called them ‘blood brothers,’ and described how ‘we’—Chen and his PRC Government friends—‘started this fight’ against the founder of the Falun Gong ‘twenty, thirty years ago.’”

The memo displayed photos obtained from Chen’s electronic devices and online accounts showing Chen at a major military parade in Beijing celebrating the 70th anniversary of Chinese communist rule in 2019. Another photo showed Chen shaking hands with communist leader Xi Jinping.

“Chen was extraordinarily proud of his history with the PRC Government and, in particular, his meeting with Xi,” the memo states, citing a recorded call in which he bragged that he had “climbed, climbed, climbed to this position,” and that “Uncle Xi“ met him ”three times in 10 years.”

Chen had also featured those three meetings, along with a photo, in a 2020 digital resume, according to the memo.

Chen was aligned with the Chinese authorities in suppressing Falun Gong and “acted as a full-fledged and enthusiastic participant in the crimes,” the prosecutors said.

“It was his fight,” Lockard said at the sentencing hearing, adding that Chen, while enjoying the freedoms in America, had tried to use these freedoms to undermine the country.



Eva Fu
Reporter



Cara Ding
Author

Eva Fu is a New York-based writer for The Epoch Times focusing on U.S. politics, U.S.-China relations, religious freedom, and human rights. Contact Eva at eva.fu@epochtimes.com



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