



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

China

China – CHN39321 – Nanjing – Jiangsu –
Protestant – Methodist
26 September 2011

1. Please provide information on the treatment of Christians in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, in both the registered official church and the unofficial, "family" church.

No information was found on the specific treatment of Christians in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, either in the registered official church and the unofficial, "family" church.

A survey of reports for the period 2008, 2009 and 2010 compiled by China Aid Organisation - www.ChinaAid.org - (an agency which monitors issues of religious freedom in China with a particular focus on 'underground' churches) has not revealed any reference to any incident occurring in Nanjing, in Jiangsu Province.

Country Advice CHN33851, dated 27 October 2008 provides information on the treatment of "family" church groups (unregistered churches) in Jiangsu province in general.¹

Brief relevant contextual information on the meaning of the word "Christian" in the People's Republic of China:

A Christian in the PRC context denotes someone who adheres to Protestantism – which is one of the five recognized religions of the PRC – the others being Catholicism, Buddhism, Daoism and Islam – all are subject to monitoring by the state. Protestants, whom the Chinese refer to as Christians, may adhere to the Methodist, Anglican, Baptist and Presbyterian faiths. According to Dr Kim-Kwong Chan, an Honorary Fellow at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Protestantism in the PRC is a predominantly rural phenomenon. Both Dr Chan and Britt Towerrey, who spent 43 years as a Baptist missionary in the region, attribute crackdowns to actions by local cadres who are uninformed and bear a grudge against someone.²

The Australian of 24 December 2009 quotes Chinese government statistical figures for the registered church and an approximate figure for the non-registered church which is predominantly evangelical:

There are about 20 million in official Protestant churches and 10 million in the official Catholic Church.

But a far bigger movement, although more difficult to estimate its size, is the so-called "house" or family churches, which have proliferated outside official government control.

¹ RRT Country Advice 2008, *Country Advice CHN33851*, 27 October<Attachment>

² Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, CHN33638.EX - *China: Protestants and Protestantism in China; treatment of Protestants; relations between the registered Three Patriotic Self Movement (TPSM) churches and unregistered churches; differences between Protestant forms of worship in China and elsewhere; differences in practice between the TPSM churches and house churches; beliefs, practices, holidays and ceremonies; update to CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999 regarding Christians in Fujian province*, 3 February <Attachment>

Fan [a Christian academic Fan Yafeng who was sacked from his job at a government think tank, the China Academy of Social Sciences in November 2009] estimates that this loose network of independent churches has about 63 million members. About 70 per cent are evangelical. "There are between 80 and 100 million Christians in China and this is growing by least 5 per cent each year," Fan says. Says Zhang Yaojie, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of the Arts: "There has been no fundamental change in the attitude of government and it's still cautious of Christianity, especially towards house churches."(p2)³

2. Is there any information on the extent to which the Chinese authorities control the religious content of the services conducted by the clergy in official churches in China more generally or Nanjing more specifically?

No report was found which addresses the specific situation in Nanjing (Jiangsu Province).

Information provided by the US State Department on the situation for religious freedom in China, dated 13 September 2011 indicates that authorities have charged religious believers who were unaffiliated with a patriotic religious association with various crimes, including "illegal religious activities" or disrupting social stability". This report also states that the government's level of respect for religious freedom in law and practice has declined in the reporting period of July to December 2010.⁴ An excerpt from the report provides details on the religious demography of the country:

According to the 2010 Blue Book of Religions, compiled by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' (CASS) Institute of World Religions, Christians number nearly 23 million, accounting for 1.8 percent of the population. The Blue Book--the first official figures compiled on the country's religions--stated that 70 percent of Christians are female and 67 percent have been baptized. Christians between the ages of 35 and 64 account for more than 60 percent of the total number and a quarter are 65 or older. According to official media, the CASS study found that 70 percent of Protestants worship in registered churches and 30 percent worship in unregistered churches, residences of friends, or their own homes.(Section I. Religious Demography)

According to June 2010 SARA [Note: from the Country Advisor: State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA)] statistics, the official Protestant population is 16 million. Government officials stated there are more than 50,000 Protestant churches registered under the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the state-approved Protestant patriotic association, and 18 TSPM theological schools. The Pew Research Center estimated in 2007 that 50 million to 70 million Christians practice in unregistered religious gatherings, also known as "house churches." A Chinese scholar estimated that the number of Protestants, including those in both registered and unregistered churches, was nearly 90 million. (Section 1. Religious Demography)

...

Since 2005 SARA has publicly acknowledged that family and friends have the right to meet at home for worship, including prayer and Bible study, without registering with the government. This statement was posted on SARA's Web site at various times. Respect for this policy at the provincial, county, and local levels was uneven, and there were several reported cases of local officials disrupting religious meetings in private homes. (Section II. Status of Religious Freedom).⁵

³ Sainbsury, M. 2009, 'Persecuted in prayer', *The Australian*, 24 December <Attachment>

⁴ US Department of State 2011, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – China*, (Section 1. Religious Demography) 13 September <Attachment>

⁵ US Department of State 2011, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – China*, (Section 1. Religious Demography) 13 September <Attachment>

The report from the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom published in May 2011 and covering the period April 2010 to March 2011, found that unregistered religious groups or those deemed by the Chinese government to threaten national security or social harmony continue to face severe restrictions, although the government tolerates some religious activity within approved organizations. The government also detained over five hundred unregistered Protestants in the past year and stepped up efforts to destroy churches and close illegal meeting points.⁶

3. Is there a Methodist church in or near Nanjing?

No reports were found which indicate that there is a Methodist church in Nanjing or near Nanjing (Jiangsu Province).

The Hong Kong-based Amity News Service provides information on the style of worship in China:

The Chinese church has been described as “post-denominational.” What does this mean? Are there still differences between CCC churches? [Note from the Country Advisor - China Christian Council (CCC) was founded in 1980 and aims to be the umbrella organization for all Protestant Christian churches in China]

Denominations went out of existence in 1958 under the influence of the “Great Leap Forward” and the lack of financial resources. However, some differences related to past traditions are still apparent. For example, in some churches the style of worship is more liturgical, in others it is more in the free church tradition. One congregation may even offer several different styles of worship. (Some groups like the Seventh Day Adventists, the True Jesus Church and the Little Flock try to maintain a more distinct identity, but in many places even these are part of a TSPM/CCC related church.) On the whole, the strategy of Chinese Christians has been to try to join around what they have in common to be one body, while respecting differences within that body and allowing for differences in theology and in liturgical styles ...⁷

In the book, ‘China’s Christian millions’, Tony Lambert – who worked with the British Embassy in Beijing – observes that the state authorities abolished all traditional denominations and groups:

all the traditional denominations and grouping were abolished when the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) forcibly united the churches in 1958... Indeed old Christians sometimes still [describe themselves as] ‘CIM’ or ‘Baptist’ even though these groupings officially disappeared by the mid-1950s... However, the clear cut divisions and denominational boundaries which we are used to in the West do not apply in China... in general, the old denominations have disappeared leaving only traces in theology and ritual as is apparent when worshipping at some TSPM churches which still retain an Anglican or Methodist flavour.⁸

⁶ US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2011, *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom - People’s Republic of China*, May. <Attachment>

⁷ Sutterlin, J. 2005, ‘Frequently asked questions about the Protestant church in China’, *Amity News Service* website, June <http://www.amitynewsservice.org/page.php?page=1150> – Accessed 18 February 2009<Attachment>

⁸ Lambert, T. 2006, *China’s Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, pp.57-59 < Attachment>

References

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, CHN33638.EX - *China: Protestants and Protestantism in China; treatment of Protestants; relations between the registered Three Patriotic Self Movement (TPSM) churches and unregistered churches; differences between Protestant forms of worship in China and elsewhere; differences in practice between the TPSM churches and house churches; beliefs, practices, holidays and ceremonies; update to CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999 regarding Christians in Fujian province*, 3 February. (CISNET CHINA CX161343)

Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford

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