

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please provide recent information about raids or prohibitions on house or family churches in Fuzhou.**
- 2. Please provide information on the types of churches in Fuzhou, including the Reply and Three-Self churches?**
- 3. Do family or house churches operate under a concept of denomination? Is there much awareness of operating under the Protestant umbrella, for example?**
- 4. Please provide any recent information on returnees to China who have been involved in Christian activities overseas?**
- 5. Please provide any recent information on the refusal by Chinese authorities to register house churches?**

RESPONSE

- 1 Please provide recent information about raids or prohibitions on house or family churches in Fuzhou.**

Information on house/family churches in Fuzhou in Fujian province, and whether the authorities prohibit their activities and/or raid their gatherings, is most recently covered in question one of September 2008 *Research Response CHN33721* (Research & Information 2008, *Research Response CHN33721*, 22 September – Attachment 1). Two reports included in this response, published in 2000 and 2005 by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, indicate that a “high-degree of religious tolerance” and a “liberal” policy toward unofficial/unregistered religious activities exists in Fuzhou and Fujian more generally. The

2000 report derived from a fact-finding mission to four of the six counties of metropolitan Fuzhou, namely, Lianjiang, Mawei, Fuqing and Changle.

A November 2008 report by the Country Research Section of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *China's Protestants and Catholics*, provides a similarly positive description of the level of tolerance shown toward Christians in Fujian, excepting those groups labeled cults such as "Shouters" and Eastern Lighting (DIAC Country Research Section 2008, *China's Protestants and Catholics*, November, pp.44-46 – Attachment 2).

The most recent reference to Christians in Fujian in this DIAC paper is to an August 2008 report by *UCAN (Union of Catholic Asian News)* on the situation of Catholics in the lead up to the Olympics. This indicated that "local officials have not imposed restrictions or given warnings to underground communities in Fujian...but that priests there are conscious of not organizing large-scale activities during this sensitive time" (DIAC Country Research Section 2008, *China's Protestants and Catholics*, November, p. 46, CISNET: 'CIS Resources, Issues Briefs' – Attachment 2; 'Restrictions placed on 'underground' priests as Olympics loom', 2008, *Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN News)* website, 7 August <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/08/07/restrictions-placed-on-underground-priests-as-olympics-loom/> – Accessed 17 February 2009 – Attachment 3).

On 9 February 2009, an Elder of the church in Melbourne provided updated advice on the situation of the Local Church ("Shouters") in Fujian in *Research Response CHN34321*:

As we understand it, the local churches in China are viewed differently in each province. Certain provinces allow the local churches to register with the authorities and once they have done so, they are allowed to worship. However, in other provinces, including Fujian province, the local churches are regarded as illegal gatherings, however as we understand from some members who come from this province, there is not much arrests as before. There is now more dialogue between members of the local church and the authorities.

...The same situation applies, as far as we understand from speaking to members who come from Fuqing city, that while the authorities do not recognise the local churches, there is not much arrests as before (Elder of the church in Melbourne 2009, Email to RRT Research & Information 'Re: Request for information from the Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney', 9 February – Attachment 27).

In *Research Response CHN34321* the Elder of the church in Melbourne also confirmed previous 2006 advice provided to the Tribunal (RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response CHN34321*, 9 February – Attachment 28).

2. Please provide information on the types of churches in Fuzhou, including the Reply and Three-Self churches?

No information was found on a "Reply" church in China. The *Amity News Service* (<http://www.amitynewsservice.org/index.php>) provides official news and information in English on the China Christian Council (CCC)/Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) in China. This includes a directory of TSPM (official Protestant) churches. It provides the following lists of churches/meeting places in Fujian province, including five in Fuzhou City and two in Fuqing City:

| Church / Meeting Place | City | Province |
|------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Fuqing City Chengguan Church | Fuqing | Fujian |
| Fuqing City Xida Church | Fuqing | Fujian |
| Fuzhou city Cangxia Church | Fuzhou | Fujian |
| Fuzhou City Guan Lane Church | Fuzhou | Fujian |
| Fuzhou City Hua Xiang Church | Fuzhou | Fujian |
| Fuzhou City Puqian Church | Fuzhou | Fujian |
| Fuzhou City Tian'an Church | Fuzhou | Fujian |
| Nanping City Gospel Church | Nanping | Fujian |
| Putian City Putian Church | Putian | Fujian |
| Quanzhou City Quannan Church | Quanzhou | Fujian |
| Quanzhou City Quanxi Church | Quanzhou | Fujian |
| Xiamen City Trinity Church | Xiamen | Fujian |
| Xiamen City Xinjie Church | Xiamen | Fujian |
| Xiamen City Xinqu Church | Xiamen | Fujian |
| Xiamen City Zhushu Church | Xiamen | Fujian |
| Dong Ban Hou Church | Zhangzhou | Fujian |

(Source: 'Churches and Meeting Points' (undated), *Amity News Service* website <http://www.amitynewsservice.org/page.php?page=1233> – Accessed 11 February 2009 – Attachment 4).

Further details on the *Hua Xiang* (Flower Lane) Church and the *Tian'an* Church listed above were found in two undated articles on the Chinese Ministry of Culture website. It provides the following information on the Flower Lane Church, located at No. 7, Flower Lane, No. 817 North Road, Dongjiekou, Fuzhou City. Originally Methodist, it is described as “one of the most important Christian churches in Fuzhou City” and “as a hub of churches in Fujian Province and Fuzhou City”:

The Flower Lane Church is located at No. 7, Flower Lane, No. 817 North Road, Dongjiekou, Fuzhou City, Fujian Province. It is **one of the most important Christian churches in Fuzhou City, and an activity center of the Flower Lane Christian Church as well as a hub of churches in Fujian Province and Fuzhou City.**

The Flower Lane Church was established in Fuzhou City around 1840. The original name was the Shangyou Church, which was one of the public churches subordinate to the Methodist Church of Fuzhou. In 1915 the **Methodist Episcopal Mission** bought this place and built the church into an institutional church, and named it *Shang You Tang*, which means social church. It was once the residence of Zhaoxin, the king of Ryukyu in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). During the Xinhai Revolution, the Fujian Revolution Army set up its headcounter here. On September 5, 1915, the first baptism was held for new adherents of Christianity. In 1938 it was restored and became the only chapel with granite structure in Fuzhou City.

The *Shang You Tang* at that time possessed classical, elegant style, with a flower hall and a fishpond. In order to deepen the impact of Christianity on the society, *Shang You Tang* founded the Jinde School, which was engaged in teaching of modern culture and served as the preparatory school for He Ling Anglo-Chinese College. Then the school was changed into the Jinde Girls Middle School and set up the Jin De Kindergarten. During the Anti-Japanese War, all school activities came to an end.

In 1949, the China Church terminated the relationship with foreign churches and no more services were conducted during the Cultural Revolution. On October 28, 1979, the Flower Lane Church restored its religious service and became the first church in Fuzhou that performed the regular service after the Cultural Revolution.

Consequently, it became the **most popular rendezvous of Fuzhou churches** and was renamed from *Shang You Tang* to the Flower Lane Church by conforming to its location. Since 1979, the church has received 3,000 man-times of visits from 40 countries and regions for international fellowships, being the exchange center between the Fujian Christianity circle and overseas religious organizations. Up to now, the Flower Lane Church has eleven social-work departments and about one thousand social workers. And it has more than ten thousand adherents of different age and from different professions.

During the Lord's Day, over 4,000 adherents gather here in two congregations. More than 2,000 adherents and admirers are attracted to the large worship on every weekend night. *Lily*, a periodical that propagandizes the religion spreads its influence overseas. The activities organized by the church, which include visiting the handicapped, taking care of loners, helping paupers, handling emergencies, keeping order in the community, etc, are on the rise ('Flower Lane Church in Fuzhou City' (undated), China Ministry of Culture.org website http://www1.chinaculture.org/library/2008-02/04/content_25594.htm – Accessed 17 February 2009 – Attachment 5).

The same website provides the following information on the Tian'an Christian Church:

The Tian'an Christian Church is located at No.15, Tian'anli, Cangshan District, Fuzhou City in Southeast China's Fujian Province. It is the birthplace of the **Methodist Episcopal Church** in East Asia.

In 1847, clergyman Colin, clergyman White and his wife arrived in Fuzhou City from the United States and began their missionary work. In the following year, Clergyman Manny got to Fuzhou City as well, and then they jointly built the Tian'an Christian Church. After ten years of missionary work, the first seven deacons were selected here who were called seven golden beacons, which made the Tian'an Christian Church famous both home and abroad. In 1897, priest Huang Zhiji raised funds of about 20,000 silver dollars and rebuilt the church to a grand cathedral that could hold one thousand people. After that, the Methodist Church hosted its important congregations here. In 1913, Mr. Sun Yat-sen attended the welcome meeting held by the church and delivered an excellent speech. In 1947, the centennial of the Methodist Church was held here.

Due to some historical reasons, the Tian'an Christian Church had been once closed. It had not been reopened until 1980, when the one-hundred-year-old church was about to collapse due to its old age. The renovation on it started in 1996 and was completed four years later. The new church that cost RMB 3 million yuan covers an area of 23,000 square meters ('Tian'an Christian Church in Fuzhou City' (undated), China Ministry of Culture.org website http://www1.chinaculture.org/library/2008-02/04/content_25599.htm – Accessed 17 February 2009 – Attachment 6).

Tony Lambert provided the following statistical information on the number of Protestants in Fuzhou and Fuqing City. He stated that in 2002 there were 300 registered churches in Fuzhou:

Fuzhou, the capital, with its six surrounding rural counties and two smaller municipalities had at least 350,000 Protestants in 2002, meeting in 300 registered churches and 2,000 meeting

points. In 2004 Fuqing City had 350,000 believers meeting in 520 churches, according to a Hong Kong Pastor...The Little Flock or “Assemblies” were started by Watchman Nee in the 1930s and are still very strong in Fujian, especially Fuzhou and Fuqing areas where they number many thousands...There are about 210,000 Roman Catholics in Fujian (Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, pp.240-1 – Attachment 7).

In 2000, the political counselor to the Canadian Embassy in China indicated that “[v]arious forms of Protestant religious expression thrive in metro Fuzhou, the indigenous “Little Flock” sect and Seventh Day Adventists” church:

Various forms of Protestant religious expression thrive in metro Fuzhou. The numbers of faithful grow rapidly year by year. There is much evidence of construction of new churches to meet the increasing demand for places of worship. Diversity of religious expression seems more extensive here than in other parts of China, including the indigenous “Little Flock” sect and Seventh Day Adventists. Seventh Day Adventist church visited on request of Political Counsellor after spotting it from the car while travelling in Fuqing County is shown at right. We were apprised of “an extreme anti Communist” Christian sect “the Huhan” faction that was declared illegal and suppressed in the 1980s, but this group is evidently very small and largely inactive now) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, *CHN34099.E* ‘China: Report of a fact finding mission to Fuzhou by political counsellor, Canadian Embassy, Beijing’, 23 March – Attachment 8).

Another 2000 report by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada refers to the True Jesus Church in Fuzhou and that a “strong Methodist tradition persists in Minqing area, northwest of Fuzhou” (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*2000/02/00e, 3 February – Attachment 13).

Insight into the types of churches in Fuzhou is also provided on the website of Pastor Steven Teo. Teo is a Melbourne-based pastor with a Licentiate in Theology at a Bible College in Melbourne, and who is an ordained minister with the Assemblies of God in Australia. He conducts ministry in South East Asia, New Zealand, Australia and other countries, with the aim of bringing a “practical and inspirational insights into the Word focusing on the gifts of the Spirit” (‘About Steven’ (undated), Pastor Steven Teo website <http://www.pssteventeo.com/about.html> – Accessed 17 February 2009 – Attachment 9). His website provides an undated report of one ministry to Fuqing and Fuzhou which is accompanied with a series of photographs. The report refers to his meeting with the Fuqing Bible School associated with the 3-Self Church in Fuqing; a pastors and leaders retreat in “Rong Tian” for “30 churches across Fuqing City”; the Ban Tou village Church with a congregation “mostly of farmers and factory workers”; and the Jin Shang Training Centre, a “1000 strong” “Watchmen Lee/Nee” church in Fuzhou city. The report also contains the following on Fuzhou city house churches and a free/open church in “Fu Xing”, Fuzhou, a “breakaway from the 3-self church”:

Fuzhou House Churches

I met with my good friend, Timothy Chu – he had traveled and interpreted for me 3 times in row over my last 3 visits. Timothy is a sharp and good man. I like him a lot!

Timothy is a trained minister of the Gospel. He is currently teaching at a Bible College – I first met him teaching at the Fuqing Bible School. He is moving on and will partner with my ministry to plant and build 10 House Churches over the next 5 years in Fuzhou. I believe he is more than capable to do just that.

We will be supporting Teacher Timothy for a year. would you like to be involved? If so, you can contact Ps Steven Teo.



Ps Steven with John Tan and Teacher Timothy Chu (right)
House Church at Shang Du, Fuzhou city – a group of professionals attend this church

Fu Xing Church

This church is an “open” church – a breakaway from the 3-self church. I was pleasantly surprised when I walked into the church. It was 2 units of residential apartment torned down to create a church complete with office, rooms and worship hall!



Choir @ Fu Xing Free Church, Fuzhou



Ps Steven ministering the Word during Sunday service at Fu Xing Free Church



Congregation on Sunday morning

Church hall – two apartment units
into a House church

(Source: Teo, S. (undated), 'Ministry Reports: Ministry in Fuqing, Fujian Province', Pastor Steven Teo website <http://www.pssteventeo.com/000105.html> – Accessed 17 February 2009 – Attachment 10).

The Local Church or "Shouters" is also present in Fuzhou. According to Jason Kindopp "Local Churches now operate legally in Shanghai, Nanjing, Fuzhou, and a number of rural counties in Zhejiang and Fujian Provinces" (Kindopp, Jason 2004, 'The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant sect', in *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party State*, 16 May, p.466 – Attachment 26).

The Catholic Church is also present in Fuzhou. For information on the location of the various Catholic churches in the Diocese of Fuzhou, see Jean Charbonnier's 2008 *Guide to the Catholic Church in China* (Charbonnier, Fr. J. 2008, *Guide to the Catholic Church in China*, China Catholic Communication, Singapore, pp. 518-524 – Attachment 11).

3. Do family or house churches operate under a concept of denomination? Is there much awareness of operating under the Protestant umbrella, for example?

It is conventional in the PRC to refer to Protestantism as Christianity (*Jidujiao*) and Protestants as Christians. Roman Catholicism is known as Catholicism (*Tianzhujiao*). While Protestantism, as one of the officially recognised religions, is said to include denominations such as the Methodist, Anglican, Baptist and Presbyterian, the TSPM/CCC is officially "post-denominational", meaning that it seeks to encourage unity and eliminate differences in belief among the various traditions (Cheng, M.M.C. 2003, 'House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China', *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March, p.17 – Attachment 12; 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*2000/02/00e, 3 February – Attachment 13).

The *Amity News Service*, while referring to the elimination of denominations in official policy and the need for unity, admits that denominational traditions remain visible:

The Chinese church has been described as “post-denominational.” What does this mean? Are there still differences between CCC churches?

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 (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 14).

Tony Lambert in his *China’s Christian Millions* (2006) states the following on the presence and awareness of denominations in Chinese house churches:

Older house church believers often consider themselves to belong to former denominations or missions in which they were brought up and converted as late as the early 1950s before all such groupings were abolished. Denominational teaching has left deep traces whether conscious or subconscious...All the traditional denominations and groupings were abolished when the TSPM forcibly unified the churches in 1958...Indeed older Christians sometimes still tell the startled visitor that they are “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 (Lambert, T. 2006, *China’s Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, pp.57-59 – Attachment 7).

The complexity and variety of denominational traditions within Protestant Christianity in China are described in detail by Daniel Bays, in his 2003 paper ‘Chinese Protestant Christianity Today’:

Protestant Christianity has been a prominent part of the general religious resurgence in China in the past two decades. Today, on any given Sunday there are almost certainly more Protestants in church in China than in all of Europe. One recent thoughtful scholarly assessment characterizes Protestantism as “flourishing” though also “fractured” (organizationally) and “fragile” (due to limits on the social and cultural role of the Church). (p.488)

...The Legacy of the Missionary Past

Foreign missionaries left China a full half-century ago, but in many urban churches the Western imprint is still visible in church architecture, liturgy, music and theology. Many Western visitors to TSPM churches today, seeing the robed choir, hearing familiar Western hymns sung in Chinese and an evangelical sermon they might have heard in the United States or Britain, may wonder how indigenous the Chinese Church really is. This situation is not altogether surprising, because of the strength of the foreign model and the fact that the last generation of Church leaders to be trained before 1949, now well into their 70s and older, is still influential, though it is fast passing from the scene. **Yet it is ironic that the TSPM,**

created explicitly to sever ties with the Western churches in the 1950s and create an indigenous post-denominational “self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing” Church, has perpetuated much of the appearance and tone of the old missionary churches, at least in many urban congregations.

The urban house churches are also not free from the strong historical influence of the West. (pp.493-494)

...The Legacy of the Independent Churches

Traditional evangelical beliefs and doctrines are even more characteristic of autonomous Protestant communities than they are of TSPM congregations. Part of the house church sector of Protestants descends from Chinese independent churches founded early in the 20th century as a reaction against the missionary-run churches. These, some of which were individual churches and others of which were movements nationwide in scope (such as Watchman Nee’s “Little Flock” or the True Jesus Church), were critical of the hierarchy and institutional complexity of Western denominations. Most sought a return to primitivist Christianity, and put stress on direct spiritual experience of conversion or supernatural acts such as healing or prophecy, as well as practising considerable autonomy for local congregations. Today, many in the autonomous Christian communities preserve the theological traditions and practices of these independent churches, especially Pentecostals, whose overt manifestations of being moved by the Holy Spirit (such as speaking in tongues, praying loudly en masse, healing practices) are frowned on in most TSPM churches because in their view they appear too much like superstition rather than religion.

At the same time, some Protestants in the tradition of the pre-1949 independent churches, for example the “Little Flock” and the True Jesus Church among others, worship in TSPM congregations. Because the True Jesus Church is Sabbath-observant – that is, they worship on Saturday – TSPM churches where they are present usually have a Saturday service. A Saturday service is also important for former Seventh Day Adventists, descendants of members of the old American missionary denomination. An important part of “Little Flock” practice is the breaking of bread (a form of communion or the Lord’s supper), usually on Sunday night. Thus those TSPM churches with believers from this tradition sometimes have a Sunday evening service which is mainly populated by these members. At such a service, many of the women may cover their heads (another “Little Flock” practice), and the congregation will break bread in the manner of the tradition.

Clearly, the Protestant scene today is thoroughly coloured by traditions from both the old missionary-established denominational churches and the several strands of the independent church movement dating back to the early 20th century. Yet beyond either of these components, perhaps the most striking feature of contemporary Protestantism is the large number of new converts who come from none of these traditions, but are products of Chinese popular culture.

The Rural Church, Chinese Popular Culture and Sectarianism

The great majority of Chinese Protestants live in rural areas, and many have only minimal knowledge of the Christian doctrines and ritual behaviour that would be familiar to most urban Christians. In their 1993 study, Hunter and Chan claimed that in understanding the appeal of Christianity to many Chinese, especially in the countryside, we must realize that in practical terms “many Christian activities ... are closely related to traditional cultural patterns.” They went on to specify many of those linkages to traditional popular culture, such as in the function of prayer, requests for healing, charismatic phenomena like shamanism, moral norms, ideas about sin and salvation, and the pragmatic aspects of

conversion. In many ways, the tone of Chinese Protestantism on the local level of practice is very different from that of the West, despite having similar doctrinal tenets (pp.494-496) (Bays, Daniel 2003, 'Chinese Protestant Christianity Today', *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 174, No. 3, June, pp.488-504 – Attachment 15).

May M.C. Cheng, in a significant paper on the “house church movement” in China, stressed that organisationally the movement does not form a coherent structure “with a single leadership, purpose or ideology” (Cheng, M.M.C. 2003, ‘House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China’, *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March, p.18 & 29 – Attachment 12).

Jason Kindopp in his 2004 paper on Protestant resilience under the PRC, expressed the view that adherents in the house-church movement “define their religious identities narrowly around the group to which they belong”, but that a division between evangelical and charismatic does exist within the movement:

To be sure, the house-church movement is far from unified. Adherents often define their religious identities narrowly around the group to which they belong. An evangelical-charismatic rift further divides the house church movement. Evangelicals, who trace their roots to the evangelical doctrines of Western missionaries and to conservative Chinese pastors such as Wing Mingdao, hold literalist views of the Bible and emphasise expository preaching in their worship. China’s charismatic Protestants, by contrast, are doctrinally subjective, stressing demonstrations of the Spirit over theological rigor. They are also supernaturalist, relying heavily on faith healings to attract new converts (Kindopp, Jason 2004, ‘Fragmented yet Defiant: Protestant Resilience under Chinese Communist Party Rule’ in Kindopp, Jason & Hamrin, Carol Lee (eds), 2004, *God and Caesar in China*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C., p.135 – Attachment 16).

Recent news articles on house churches in China refer to them as non-denominational. An October 2008 piece in *The Economist* on the rise of Christianity in China, especially house churches, indicates that most are non-denominational:

Now the largest, fastest-growing number of Christians belong to Protestant “house churches”.

In a suburb of Shanghai, off Haining Road, neighbours peer warily across the hallway as visitors file into a living room, bringing the number to 25, the maximum gathering allowed by law without official permission. Inside, young urban professionals sit on sofas and folding chairs. A young woman in a Che Guevara T-shirt blesses the group and a man projects material accessed from the internet from his laptop onto the wall. Heads turn towards the display and sing along: “Glory, Glory Glory; Holy, Holy, Holy; God is near to each one of us.” It is Sunday morning, and worship is beginning in one of thousands of house churches across China.

House churches are small congregations who meet privately—usually in apartments—to worship away from the gaze of the Communist Party. In the 1950s, the Catholic and main Protestant churches were turned into branches of the religious-affairs administration. House churches have an unclear status, neither banned nor fully approved of. As long as they avoid neighbourly confrontation and keep their congregations below a certain size (usually about 25), the Protestant ones are mostly tolerated, grudgingly. Catholic ones are kept under closer scrutiny, reflecting China’s tense relationship with the Vatican.

Private meetings in the houses of the faithful were features of the early Christian church, then seeking to escape Roman imperial persecution. Paradoxically, the need to keep congregations

small helped spread the faith. That happens in China now. The party, worried about the spread of a rival ideology, faces a difficult choice: by keeping house churches small, it ensures that no one church is large enough to threaten the local party chief. But the price is that the number of churches is increasing.

The church in Shanghai is barely two years old but already has two offspring, one for workers in a multinational company, the other for migrant labourers. As well as spreading the Word, the proliferation of churches provides a measure of defence against intimidation. One pastor told the *Far Eastern Economic Review* last year that if the head of one house church was arrested, “the congregation would just split up and might break into five, six or even ten new house churches.”

Abundant church-creation is a blessing and a curse for the house-church movement, too. The smiling Mr Zhao says finance is no problem. “We don’t have salaries to pay or churches to build.” But “management quality” is hard to maintain. Churches can get hold of Bibles or report hymn books from the internet. They cannot so easily find experienced pastors. “In China”, says one, “the two-year-old Christian teaches the one-year-old.”

Because **most Protestant house churches are non-denominational** (that is, not affiliated with Lutherans, Methodists and so on), **they have no fixed liturgy or tradition. Their services are like Bible-study classes.** This puts a heavy burden on the pastor. One of the Shanghai congregation who has visited a lot of house churches sighs with relief that “this pastor knows what he is talking about” (‘Christianity in China: Sons of heaven’ 2008, *The Economist*, 2 October

http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=12342509 – Accessed 17 February 2009 – Attachment 17).

Nicholas Kristof in a 2006 piece for the *New York Times* states that the churches are “usually evangelical without any specific denomination”:

This boom in religion, particularly Christianity but also including the Bahai faith and various cults, reflects a spiritual yearning among many Chinese. While China has an official Catholic church and an official nondenominational Protestant church, which are not suppressed and people can join freely, **the fastest-growing churches are the underground ones -- usually evangelical without any specific denomination** -- that are independent of the government. The total number of Chinese Christians today probably exceeds 40 million, and some estimates go far higher (Kristof, Nicholas D. 2006, ‘Keeping Faith In China’, *New York Times*, 25 June – Attachment 18).

Tony Lambert in a 2006 overview of the house church network points to their theological diversity and believes they can most accurately be characterised as evangelical and at times fundamentalist:

Theologically, house churches are very diverse. They range from the wildly charismatic to the ultra-conservative and all shades in between. All accept the Bible as the word of God and, although overseas categories do not always apply neatly, **they may be regarded as “evangelical” and sometimes even “fundamentalist.”** All believe that the sovereign God is alive and able to heal and work miracles in answer to prayer—however, this, again, does not mean that all can be neatly labeled “charismatic” in the overseas sense. The overseas visitor is struck by certain characteristics which stand out in many widely varying situations:

- Hunger for God’s word and delight in in-depth exposition (sermons lasting 1-2 hours are common);
- Intensity in prayer, both private and communal;

- Zeal for personal evangelism;
- Belief in the supernatural which takes the Scriptures at face value;
- Concern for truth and right doctrine (often leading to acrimonious divisions);
- Willingness to suffer for the gospel;
- Centrality of the cross and atonement of Christ (Lambert, Tony 2006, 'House-Church Networks: An Overview', *Global Chinese Ministries Newsletter*, March, April & May (Parts 1, 2 & 3) – Attachment 19).

In 2006, Human Rights Watch published a summary of the religious situation after China's *Regulations on Religious Affairs* came into force on 1 March 2005. It described house churches as "ostensibly independent but usually belong to one of several large, hierarchical religious groups":

A crackdown on the activities of so-called Christian (Protestant) house churches in Shanxi, Henan, Hubei, and Jiangxi provinces began shortly after the regulations went into effect and lasted throughout 2005 and into 2006. Some house churches were refused registration, while other refused to register.

The term "house church" refers to congregations that refused to join with other Protestant denominations, such as Methodists, Anglicans, and Lutherans, in the non-denominational church structure that the Chinese government insisted should accommodate all Protestants. House church members, often referred to as fundamentalists, believe such a church could not accommodate their doctrinal or liturgical traditions. **House churches are ostensibly independent, but usually belong to one of several large, hierarchical religious groups** (Human Rights Watch 2006, *China: A Year After New Regulations, Religious Rights Still Restricted*, 1 March – Attachment 20).

4. Please provide any recent information on returnees to China who have been involved in Christian activities overseas?

In February 2008 DFAT confirmed two previous reports provided below, dated 22 March 2007 and 15 September 2006 remain current. These comment on the treatment that returnees, including underground church members, who are unsuccessful asylum seekers and who are returned to China, might receive from the authorities (DIAC Country Information Service 2008, *Country Information Report No. 08/8 – Review of Information on Falun Gong*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 11 February 2008), 12 February – Attachment 21).

The two DFAT advices are:

...R.2. In terms of the possible treatment the person might receive on return to China, it is not particularly important how the person comes to the attention of Chinese authorities. As advised in reftel, it is not possible to comment definitively on how Chinese authorities would treat returnees to China who were failed asylum seekers. If Chinese authorities believed them to be a member of one of these groups (Falun Gong, **underground church**, political dissidents), it would be likely that authorities would interview them and might keep them under surveillance or detain them for a short period. Authorities may record the failed asylum attempt in the person's dossier ("dang an"), which could impede the person's attempts to obtain employment (particularly government employment) or engage in further education. If the person was a high-profile activist in Australia (for example a prominent Falun Gong leader, or someone known for publicly criticising the Chinese leadership) it is likely that the authorities would treat them more severely (longer-term surveillance, administrative detention) than if the person was a low-profile member of one of these groups (DIAC Country Information Service 2007, *Country Information Report No. CHN8980 – CIS Request*

CHN8980: *China: Publication of client details*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 20 March 2007), 22 March – Attachment 22).

And:

R.1. It is not possible to comment definitively on how Chinese authorities would treat returnees to China who were failed asylum seekers. It would be very likely that Chinese authorities would interview them and might keep them under surveillance and detain them for a short period. Any further action would depend on the circumstances of the individual cases. Authorities maintain a dossier on every PRC citizen and we would expect authorities would record the person's failed asylum attempt in this file. This conceivably could impede the person's attempts to obtain employment (particularly government employment) or engage in further education.

...R.3. BJ551458L (CX160293) provided advice on the treatment of **members of underground churches** in China and that advice is applicable also to this question. Those whose Christian activity was through membership of registered churches in China are less likely to face any repercussions, however it would depend on the circumstances of each case (DIMIA Country Information Service 2006, *Country Information Report No. 06/53 – China: Return of failed asylum seekers*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 14 September 2006), 15 September – Attachment 23).

5. Please provide any recent information on the refusal by Chinese authorities to register house churches?

The *Amity News Service* (<http://www.amitynewsservice.org/index.php>), which provides official news and information in English on the China Christian Council/Three-Self Patriotic Movement in China, gives some details on the reasons why some churches are refused registration. This includes that “some which have applied and been denied because they do not meet one or more of the requirements above or because local officials have unfairly denied the registration”:

V. Registration of Churches

What is the difference between a registered and an unregistered church? A registered congregation has chosen to comply with the government regulations for registration of places of worship and has met six general requirements. If anyone tries to infringe upon their rights under the law, they have legal grounds to seek rectification of the situation.

What are the six requirements for registration? 1-2) The congregation must have a fixed place and name. 3) There must be citizens who are religious believers regularly participating in religious activities. 4) They must have a management organization composed of citizens who are religious believers. 5) They must have persons meeting the requirements of the particular religious group to lead religious services. 6) They must have their own legal source of income.

Why are there still unregistered churches? Some congregations disagree theologically with any kind of civil registration for churches and therefore choose not to seek registration. Others are strongly committed to a narrowly defined set of theological beliefs and are not willing to have fellowship with other Christians who do not fully share their convictions. **Additionally there are congregations which have applied for registration and are awaiting approval, and some which have applied and been denied because they do not meet one or more of**

the requirements above or because local officials have unfairly denied the registration. (There is a process to appeal the denial of an application to register.)

What are “house churches”? This term is unclear because both “home meeting points” and “meeting points” are often described as “house churches.” They usually do not have their own ordained pastor and rely on lay leadership for most of their activities. A “meeting point” has its own building, while a “home meeting point” meets in a private home. Many Christian groups start as home meeting points, grow into meetings points, and from there sometimes become churches with a church building and pastor.

Are there registered “meeting points” and “home meeting points”? Yes. In fact the majority of registered Christian bodies are meeting points. **Many home meeting points operate as adjuncts (like Bible study groups) of registered meeting points or churches, so home meeting points don’t need to register in most provinces.**

What is the “underground church”? A more appropriate description might be “churches which chose to remain unregistered,” which usually means they do not relate to the local Christian Council or TSPM. “Underground church” is often a misnomer as some of these congregations are quite public.

Are there registered churches that are not a part of the TSPM and the CCC? Yes. Registration does not require a congregation to join either the TSPM or the CCC.

Do unregistered and registered churches work together? If so, why? If not, why not? In some areas individual congregations have worked well together, but in many cases unregistered congregations prefer not to work with registered ones. Attitudes of individual congregations may be rooted in theological differences, misunderstandings, or mistrust (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 14).

The US Department of State’s 2008 *International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – China* has extensive information on the regulations and procedures for registration of church groups in China. Within this discussion it points out that the government refused registration in some instances because they believed the clergy did not have the requisite credentials, on other occasions refusals were “without cause”. The Chinese government maintained refusal occurred because groups failed to meet legal requirements:

The 2005 Regulations on Religious Affairs (RRA) protect the rights of registered religious groups to possess property, publish literature, train and approve clergy, and collect donations. The Government had not issued implementing regulations by the end of the period covered by this report, and there was little evidence that the new regulations have themselves expanded religious freedom, in part because unregistered religious organizations have not been able to register under the RRA without first affiliations with a PRA [Patriotic Religious Associations]. Before the passage of the RRA, a few Protestant groups reportedly registered independently of the TSPM/CCC. These included the Little Flock Protestant churches in Zhejiang and the (Korean) Chaoyang Church in Jilin Province. It was not clear whether these religious groups affiliated with the TSPM/CCC or whether they registered independently. The (Russian) Orthodox Church has been able to operate without affiliating with a PRA in a few areas.

While the activities of unregistered religious groups remained outside the scope of the RRA’s legal protection, these groups and their activities continued to expand. Most Christian groups,

the majority of which are not members of the PRAs, no longer operated in strict secrecy. Instead, they carried out public activities, including convening seminars, publishing materials, renting space for offices and events, and disseminating information on the Internet. Church summer camps and weekend retreats are also popular. Many unregistered religious groups also carried out social service work.

Both SARA and the TSPM/CCC state that registration regulations do not require that a congregation join either the TSPM or the CCC; however, nearly all local RAB officials require registered Protestant congregations and clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC. **Some unregistered religious groups who attempted to register were told by the RAB that their clergy did not have the requisite TSPM/CCC credentials. Other groups reported that authorities denied their applications without cause or detained group members who met with officials when they attempted to register. The Government contended that these refusals were the result of these groups' lack of adequate facilities or failure to meet other legal requirements.**

Some unregistered Protestant groups refuse to register or affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because the TSPM/CCC puts submission to the CCP over submission to God. In particular, some house churches have objected to the TSPM's restrictions on evangelizing to or baptizing those under 18 and receiving religious materials from abroad, as well as its instructions to uphold Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought. **Moreover, some groups disagreed with the TSPM/CCC teachings that differences in the tenets of different Protestant creeds can be reconciled or accommodated under one "post-denominational" religious umbrella organization.** Others did not seek registration independently or with one of the PRAs due to fear of adverse consequences if they revealed, as required, the names and addresses of church leaders or members. Unregistered groups also frequently did not affiliate with one of the PRAs for fear that doing so would allow government authorities to control sermon content and speakers.

A religious group may seek registration as "a religious organization" or as a "venue for religious activity." According to RRA Chapter 3, Article 13, a religious group must first obtain registration as a "religious organization" in order to obtain registration as a "religious venue." However, SARA has stated that in principle any unregistered group may register a venue without first becoming registered as a religious organization.

According to RRA Chapter 2, Article 6, registration as a "religious organization" is governed by the "Regulations on the Management of Registration of Social Organizations" (RSO) which are administered by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA). There are six requirements for registration under the RSO. These requirements are: 50 individual members or 30 institutional members, or a total of 50 members if there are both individual and institutional members; a standard name and organizational capacity; a fixed location; a staff with qualifications appropriate to the activities to the organization; lawful assets and a source of funds (i.e., national level organizations must have a minimum of \$14,620 (100,000 RMB) and local social and inter-area social organizations must have a minimum of \$4,381 (30,000 RMB); and legal liability in its own right. SARA has stated that there may only be one recognized organization per religion. The TSPM is the only registered Protestant religious organization registered under the RSO.

Registration of a venue must take place according to RRA Chapter 3, which lists five requirements in Chapter 3, Article 14: establishment of a site consistent with the overall purpose of the RRA which must not be used to "disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the state," or be "subject to any foreign domination;" local religious citizens must have a need to carry out collective religious activities frequently; there must be religious personnel qualified to preside over the activities;

the site must have the “necessary funds;” and the site must be “rationally located” so as not to interfere with normal production and neighboring residents. According to RRA Chapter 4, Article 27, clergy must report to the appropriate RAB after being certified by the concerned PRA.

A growing number of religious groups that have chosen to affiliate with a registered venue of the TSPM were now able to meet legally under the supervision of the venue.

Religious groups that remain unaffiliated and unregistered continued to be vulnerable to government interference. In September 2007 the Beijing municipal public security bureau (PSB) passed a regulation prohibiting landlords from renting properties to persons with “irregular lifestyles,” including those who conduct illegal religious activities. Several house church groups reported that they were forced to change locations for their meetings after Beijing authorities threatened landlords with punishment for renting to them (US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – China*, 19 September, ‘Section II. Status of Religious Freedom: Legal/Policy Framework’ – Attachment 24).

Robert Marquand, writing for *The Christian Science Monitor* in 2003, quotes a government official in Fujian on the matter of refusing registration to churches:

Churches in the city of Wenzhou last year conducted a campaign of civil disobedience in response to official efforts to stop the teaching of Sunday School. Evangelicals in Henan Province have been targeted, as have home-church prayer leaders in Shanghai, who have been sent to labor camps in recent months. Church building is constricted. A government official in Fujian says one reason for so many home churches is that official services are overflowing. **“It is very difficult to register any new churches right now,” says the official. There has always been a policy not to allow more churches, but now it is being enforced. The government wants to stop the evangelical growth**” (Marquand, Robert 2003, ‘In China, pews are packed’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 December <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1224/p01s03-wosc.html> – Accessed 12 December 2006 – Attachment 25).

A 2000 report by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada of a fact-finding mission to four counties of metropolitan Fuzhou (Lianjiang, Mawei, Fuqing and Changle) states that “over half of the places of religious worship in the area are “as yet” unregistered”:

At all meetings in Fuzhou and the county towns and villages, it was affirmed that Fuzhou has no branch of the China Democracy Party or other “unregistered” political organizations, nor have there been any incidences of “illegal” trade unions in this part of Fujian. Based on other information available to us, these assertions are credible. **Over half of the places of religious worship in the area are “as yet” unregistered** (photo shows discussion with **Protestant Ministers at former Anglican Church in Longtian Town, Fuqing County** re: status of unregistered “meeting places” in local villages that are affiliated with this church that receives an average of 1,200 worshippers every Sunday. This discussion was videotaped [the sole incidence of this intrusion], but the presence of the camera did not seem to inhibit the frankness of discussion. The stop at this Church was at my request and clearly not anticipated in advance). This situation does not seem to trouble the local authorities. In other parts of China congregations at unregistered places of worship are periodically subject to police harassment on direction of the local bureaux for Civil Affairs. No indication that this has been the case in the four counties visited was found. Extensive interviews with Christians throughout the visit suggested that relations with local authorities have been consistently nonconfrontational in recent years) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, *CHN34099.E ‘China: Report of a fact finding mission to Fuzhou by political counsellor, Canadian Embassy, Beijing’*, 23 March – Attachment 2).

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Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

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