

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: CHN33597
Country: China
Date: 29 July 2008

Keywords: China – Unregistered Christians in Fuqing and Fujian.

This response was prepared by the Research & Information Services Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. This research response may not, under any circumstance, be cited in a decision or any other document. Anyone wishing to use this information may only cite the primary source material contained herein.

Questions

1. Please provide details as to the degree which the PRC authorities pursue underground Christians in Fuqing.

RESPONSE

1. Please provide details as to the degree which the PRC authorities pursue underground Christians in Fuqing.

Information for this question has been provided for [Fuqing](#) city and [Fujian](#) province.

Fuqing

The 2006 edition of *China's Christian Millions* describes Fuqing City as “China’s Second Jerusalem” due to approximately 26% of the population being Christian. However, no recent information was found in the sources consulted regarding the treatment of underground Christians in Fuqing by government authorities. A Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Country Information Report dated 28 November 2007 reports on the difficulty in accessing information on underground Christians in China due to limitations in freely available information and the “political sensitivity” of the information. DFAT, in line with this advice, stated that it “has no specific information regarding the enforcement of the prohibition of underground churches in Fujian generally, or in Fuqing in particular” (Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, p.p240-241 – Attachment 1; DIAC Country Information Service 2007, Country Information Report No.07/88 – China: CISQuest CHN9120 – ‘Shouters’ Christian group and Fujian Province (sourced from DFAT advice of 28 November 2007), 29 November – Attachment 2).

Tony Lambert, an expert on Christianity in China, in his 2006 edition of *China's Christian Millions* reports that Fuqing city has the “second greatest number of churches in the whole country”. Lambert does not, however, provide specific information on the treatment of underground Christians in Fuqing:

Fujian has a thriving and rapidly growing Christian community. As a coastal province in the south-east, it was one of the first to be evangelised from the early nineteenth century. By 1949 there were about 100,000 Protestants. Official estimates of numbers of Protestant Christians in 2004 were 1,179,000 – a twelve-fold growth after fifty-five years of Communism. In early 1999 a TSPM spokesman stated there are 4,000 registered churches and meeting points. In 2000 the TSPM magazine *Tianfeng* revealed there were over 1,200 pastoral workers in Fujian.

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. After Wenzhou, it is the area with the second greatest number of churches in the whole country, and has been dubbed “China’s Second Jerusalem”.** **About 26 per cent of the population are Christian** (Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford pp. 240-241 – Attachment 1).

In 2002 Human Rights Watch reported on the sentencing of a man to two years’ imprisonment in Fuqing for the smuggling of unapproved Bibles. The man sought to bring in 33,000 bibles to Church groups (Human Rights Watch, 2002, *China Human Rights Update*, Human Rights Watch Press Backgrounder, February, Section: ‘Freedom of Religion and Belief’ http://hrw.org/backgrounder/asia/china_update.htm – Accessed 29 July 2008 – Attachment 3).

In 2000, the Political Counsellor of the Canadian Embassy, Beijing undertook a fact-finding mission to Metropolitan Counties in Fuzhou including Fuqing, to examine issues including religious freedom. A report of the mission states that “there is a high degree of religious tolerance in this part of China” and reported on the lack of harassment of underground Christians by the Chinese authorities. The report provides the following relevant information:

There is a high degree of religious tolerance in this part of China. In Changle county only 10 of 80 Catholic parishes are affiliated with the state sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). The other 70 remaining loyal to Rome are technically illegal and therefore “underground churches,” but reportedly these congregations are not harassed by the local authorities at present. Reports of the recent arrest of Yang Shudao, Archbishop of the Fuzhou Archdiocese, who has consistently refused to cooperate with the CPA, is a cause for concern. Archbishop Yang has served close to 30 years in detention in China since his first arrest in 1955. However his arrests have not directly impacted on the activities of local congregations in the four rural counties which are the subject of this report. In recent years Catholics there have been allowed to profess their faith in accordance with their own consciences. There is no indication that this is about to change. Nevertheless, the Embassy will continue to monitor the situation closely. 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. (pt.3ii)

...Over half of the places of religious worship in the area are “as yet” unregistered

... 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. These four counties have a high per centage of Christian faithful compared with other parts of Fujian, a legacy of a strong presence of British and American Christian missionaries operating out of Fuzhou in the pre Communist period (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, Section 6ii – Attachment 4).

Fujian

Available information indicates that while official religious policy has been described as being applied relatively liberally in Fujian there have been recent reports of church closures and church demolitions in the province (Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford p. 241 – Attachment 1; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, *CHN100387.E – China: Situation of Protestants and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2001-2005)*, 1 September – Attachment 5; US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – China*, 14 September, Section 2 – Attachment 6; US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2007, *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, May, p.115 – Attachment 7).

The US Department of State's (USDOS) most recent International Religious Freedom Report for China (2007) indicates there have been reports of church closures in Fujian. The report states that:

Police sometimes closed unregistered places of worship, including Catholic churches and Protestant house churches with significant memberships, properties, financial resources, and networks. The Government closed churches in Zhejiang, Jilin, and Fujian Provinces during the reporting period. In some cases local officials destroyed the properties of unregistered religious groups (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – China*, 14 September, Section 2 – Attachment 6).

The 2006 edition of *China's Christian Millions* describes the official religious policy in Fujian as “applied relatively liberally in Fujian, although there have been occasional crackdowns on house churches and underground Catholics” (Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford p. 241 – Attachment 1).

A June 2007 report by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) provides information on raids on Protestant house churches in China. According to the IRB “there were also reports of house churches being destroyed in the provinces of Jilin and Fujian” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, *CHN102492.E – China: Reports of raids on Protestant house churches; frequency and location of raids (2005 – 2007)*, 22 June – Attachment 8).

The latest annual report from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), released in May 2007, provides information on the treatment of unregistered Protestants in China. The USCIRF mentions the reported demolition of house churches in Fujian:

Conditions for unregistered Protestant groups in China remained poor during the last year. According to the State Department, in some regions of China, Protestant groups that refuse to affiliate with the government-sanctioned religious associations, either because of theological differences or political objections, are subject to intimidation, extortion, harassment, detention, as well as the forcible closure of their churches. In the last year, the Chinese government continued to raid house church meetings, fining and detaining pastors and lay leaders. In the last year, at least 110 Protestant leaders were detained for a period of 10 days or more, with at least 17 of these receiving prison sentences of one or more years.

In addition, the State Department estimates that “thousands” of house church members were detained for short periods in the last year. The majority of arrests and detentions occurred in Henan, Zhejiang, and Xinjiang provinces. In June 2006, Pastor Zhang Rongliang was sentenced to seven and a half years imprisonment on charges of obtaining a false passport. In July 2005, Protestant Pastor Cai Zhuohua and two other relatives were sentenced to three years, two years, and 18 months in prison respectively for “illegal business activities,” stemming from their large-scale publishing of Bibles and Christian literature without government approval. In October 2006, Protestant Pastor Wang Zaiqing was sentenced to two years of imprisonment on similar charges. Observers report that the use of criminal charges to target Protestant leaders is a recent tactic used by Chinese authorities to halt religious activity conducted without government permission. **During the last year, demolition of Protestant churches was reported in Zhejiang, Jilin, Fujian, Anhui, and Inner Mongolia provinces; churches in the cities of Guangdong and Shandong were forced to close.**

...Religious freedom conditions vary by region for unregistered Protestant congregations and, in some parts of the country, unregistered “house churches,” which range in size from a dozen to several hundred members, meet openly and with the full knowledge of local authorities. For example, in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Protestant leaders report that unregistered house churches are able to maintain their activities without interference from authorities. In other provinces, local officials have great discretion in determining whether “house churches” are allowed to exist. Protestant “house churches” encounter difficulties when their membership grows, when they arrange for the regular use of facilities, or when they forge links with other unregistered groups or with coreligionists overseas. The Chinese government’s 1997 White Paper on Religion states that it is unnecessary for “small groups of families and friends” who meet in homes to register their activities with the government. Chinese government authorities reiterated this claim during meetings with a delegation of USCIRF Commissioners in Beijing in August 2005. Provincial-level regulations also include language that permits “religious life in the home.” Within the last year, however, police conducted raids on hundreds of house church gatherings, confiscated literature, detained and questioned participants, and, in some cases, tried and imprisoned house church leaders. Such raids occurred most frequently in Henan and Zhejiang, where the majority of Protestant religious activity occurs, and in Xinjiang, where oppressive policies on religious affairs are more strictly implemented (US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2007, *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, May, pp.114-115 – Attachment 7).

In September 2005, the IRB reported on the treatment of Christians in the southern Chinese provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. The IRB refer to 2005 correspondence from the Executive Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council who states that Fujian and Guangdong have “the most liberal policy on religion in China, especially on Christianity”, and also reports on the tolerance of local authorities towards unregistered Christian groups. The IRB report provides the following overview of Christians in Fujian and Guangdong:

Human Rights in China (HRIC) commented in 4 August 2005 correspondence to the Research Directorate that the treatment of Christians is poor in southern China, particularly in the rural areas, though the organization could not elaborate, citing a lack of available information. **However, the executive secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council commented that Fujian and Guangdong have “the most liberal policy on religion in China, especially on Christianity” (Executive secretary 1 Sept. 2005a). In his travels, the executive secretary has met with local authorities who, he said, usually tolerate activities of unregistered Christian groups (1 Sept. 2005a).** While authorities are of a more tolerant nature in rural areas than in urban centres, they would usually take steps to discourage religious activity if it had a link to groups from outside China (Executive secretary 1 Sept. 2005a). The executive secretary stated that he is aware of a number of unregistered churches along with Bible schools, fellowships and even missionaries that have been allowed to operate in the two provinces for years (1 Sept. 2005a). As an example, he cited the case of Pastor Samuel Lamb’s unregistered Damajan Church in Guangzhou, which he said has been allowed to hold meetings on a daily basis for 20 years without interference from authorities (1 Sept. 2005a). In cases where arrests have been made, the executive secretary pointed out that groups such as the Shouters and the Eastern Lighting, which are considered “heretical” by many Christians, have been targeted (1 Sept. 2005a) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, *CHN100387.E – China: Situation of Protestants and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2001-2005)*, 1 September – Attachment 5).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada <http://www.irb.gc.ca/>

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

US Commission on International Religious Freedom <http://www.uscirf.gov/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

US Department of State website <http://www.state.gov>

United Nations (UN)

UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.ch/>

Non-Government Organisations

Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) <http://www.aidtochurch.org/>

Amnesty International website <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Christian Solidarity Worldwide <http://www.csw.org.uk/>

Forum 18 <http://www.forum18.org/Analyses.php?region=3>

Freedom House <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=1>

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

International Christian Concern (<http://www.persecution.org/>)

International Coalition for Religious Freedom (<http://www.china21.org/English/>)

Region Specific Links

China Aid Association http://www.chinaaid.org/english_site/index.php

MonitorChina.Org http://www.monitorchina.org/chinese_site/index.php

Search Engines

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

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)
ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)
RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford.
2. DIAC Country Information Service 2007, Country Information Report No.07/88 – China: CISQuest CHN9120 – ‘Shouters’ Christian group and Fujian Province (sourced from DFAT advice of 28 November 2007), 29 November. (CISNET China CX189037)
3. Human Rights Watch 2002, *China Human Rights Update*, Human Rights Watch Press Backgrounder, February http://hrw.org/backgrounder/asia/china_update.htm – Accessed 29 July 2008.
4. 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. (REFINFO)
5. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, CHN100387.E – *China: Situation of Protestants and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2001-2005)*, 1 September. (REFINFO)
6. US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – China*, 14 September
7. US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2007, *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, May.
8. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, CHN102492.E – *China: Reports of raids on Protestant house churches; frequency and location of raids (2005 – 2007)*, 22 June.