

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: CHN31083
Country: China
Date: 13 December 2006 [Updated 15 December 2006]

Keywords: China – Registered churches – Unregistered Churches – Sermons – Bingdingjiao

This response was prepared by the Country Research 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.

Questions

- 1. Please provide the following information on registered churches. Are registered churches associated with and registered as particular Christian denomination or are they simply generic Christian Churches?**
- 2. Is there evidence that these churches are political in the sense that the priests give sermons related to political issues?**
- 3. Can you locate a list of registered Christian churches close to Bingjiangdao Heping District Tianjin City?**
- 4. Is there any evidence that a person who had been in trouble with the authorities would be refused entry into a registered church?**
- 5. Are underground Christian churches formed along the lines of a particular denomination or are they simply generic?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide the following information on registered churches. Are registered churches associated with and registered as particular Christian denomination or are they simply generic Christian Churches?**

Sources report that registered Christian churches in China are either Protestant or Catholic. Registered Protestant churches in China are generally non-denominational as denominations were disbanded in 1954 when all Protestant churches were ordered to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TPSM).

The Chinese government recognises five religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam and Protestantism. Religious organisations are required to register with the Chinese government and submit to the leadership of patriotic religious organisations. According to the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China, “patriotic associations ensure that religious doctrine conforms to state policy by controlling such matters as the training of religious leaders, contacts with religious groups outside China, the interpretation of religious texts, the content of sermons, and the publication of religious materials” (US Congressional-

Executive Commission on China 2006, *Annual Report 2006*, 20 September, pp.7 & 79 – Attachment 1).

The TPSM leads the registered Protestant Church in China while the Catholic Patriotic Association leads the registered Catholic Church in China (US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report 2006 – China*, 15 September, Section 1 – Attachment 2).

Protestant denominations in China were officially disbanded in 1954 when all Protestant churches were ordered to join the TSPM (Crowell, Todd 1994, 'The Great Awakening: China's Religious Revival', *Asiaweek*, 17 August – Attachment 3).

According to the US Department of State, some Protestant groups have registered without affiliating with the TPSM and some registered Protestant churches have informally aligned themselves with Protestant denominations:

Some groups disagree with the TPSM/CCC [Chinese Christian Council] teachings that all Protestant beliefs are compatible and that differences between Protestant denominations are irrelevant. In a few regions, Protestant groups have registered without affiliating with the TPSM/CCC. These exceptions include the Local Assemblies Protestant churches in Zhejiang Province, where no significant TPSM/CCC community exists, and the (Korean) Chaoyang Church in Jilin Province, both of which operate openly without affiliating with the TPSM/CCC. Additionally, the (Russian) Orthodox Church has been able to operate without affiliating with a government organizations in a few parts of the country. In other regions, officially "post-denominational" Protestant churches informally aligned themselves with Protestant denominations. Some pastors in official churches said that denominational affiliation was an important way of drawing parishioners (US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report 2006 – China*, 15 September, Section II – Attachment 2).

2. Is there evidence that these churches are political in the sense that the priests give sermons related to political issues?

No evidence of priests, pastors or religious leaders of registered churches giving sermons or preaching on political issues was found amongst the sources consulted.

Tony Lambert, an expert on Christian groups in China and author of *China's Christian Millions* (2006), was contacted in regard to this matter on 12 December 2006 (RRT Country Research 2006, Email to Tony Lambert 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN31083)', 12 December – Attachment 4).

Tony Lambert replied on 15 December 2006. The information is as follows:

In answer to question one my experience since the churches began to open in Spring 1979 (and I have visited churches in 28 of 31 provinces over the last 27 years) is that in the overwhelming majority of cases church pastors/priests preach Bible-based sermons, usually at least 45 minutes long (sometimes longer!) Very occasionally there is a slight political reference usually at the beginning of the sermon ('thanks to the policy of religious freedom etc etc) and then the preacher proceeds to give a spiritual sermon. In other words occasional lip-service is paid to the government but in practice the sermons are Christian (often more so than in some churches in the West!) I have never heard a political message in a church, and in the present situation the government knows the 'official' churches would rapidly empty of

worshippers (Lambert, Tony 2006, Email 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN31083)', 15 December – Attachment 5).

Sermons

According to the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China, patriotic associations control the content of sermons. According to the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, the Chinese government “monitors sermons and teachings of religious organizations to ensure that they do not preach against government policy.” According to Freedom House, “Sermons must stick to approved topics under penalty of arrest” (Freedom House 2002, *Report Analyzing Seven Secret Chinese Government Documents*, 11 February – Attachment 6; International Coalition for Religious Freedom 2004, *Religious Freedom in China*, 10 May – Attachment 7; and US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2006, *Annual Report 2006*, 20 September, p.79 – Attachment 1).

Theological Construction

While no evidence of priests, pastors or religious leaders of registered churches giving sermons or preaching on political issues was found, the Chinese government policy of theological construction may see sermons influenced by socialism and therefore more political than religious in nature.

A 1998 policy known as the Theological Construction Campaign aims to make Christianity compatible with socialism. The US Congressional- Executive Commission reports that theological construction continues to be imposed on registered seminaries. According to former TPSM leader Bishop Ding (also known as Ting), and reported by the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China, theological construction will “weaken those aspects within Christian faith that do not conform with the socialist society.” *The Christian Science Monitor* reports that theological construction “can be summed up by what are known as the ‘Four Againsts’: the Bible is not the revealed World, Jesus was not born of a virgin, the resurrection is a myth, and there is no ‘second coming.’” For more information on the theology of theological construction please see Attachment 8. *Compass Direct* quotes a former TPSM leader who was dismissed because of his strong stand for the gospel says “Theological construction is liberal theology combined with politics and pushed by the government. Ding has adapted the terminology of the Communist Party and introduced it into the church. He uses religious terms to express Marxist ideology. The campaign must be seen in the context of the Party’s obsession with ideological conformity” (Davenport, Paul 2000, ‘Making Theology Compatible With Socialism’, *Worthy News*, source: *Compass Direct*, 17 November <http://www.worthynews.com/news-features/compass-china-socialism.html> – Accessed 12 December 2006 – Attachment 8; Davenport, Paul 2001, ‘China’s “Theological Construction” Campaign Intensifies’, *Compass Direct*, 17 July, World Evangelical Alliance website http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/textonly/3persec_china_17jul01.html – Accessed 12 December 2006 – Attachment 9; 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 10; and US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2006, *Annual Report 2006*, 20 September, p.93 – Attachment 1).

Correspondence

China Ministries International was contacted in regard to this matter on 12 December 2006. No reply has been received to date. Any reply received will be forwarded to the Member (RRT Country Research 2006, Email to China Ministries International 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN31083)', 12 December – Attachment 11).

3. Can you locate a list of registered Christian churches close to Bingjiangdao Heping District Tianjin City?

Bingjiangdao is a street or road in Heping District, Tianjin City. Sources report that Xikai Church and Wesley Church are located on Bingjiangdao.

The China Culture website provides the following information on the Xikai Church:

The Xikai Church, also called the French Church, is a famous Catholic church in Tianjin City. It is located at the area of Old Xikai out of Yuanqiangzi River, Dushan Road, Bingjiang Street in Heping District, Tianjin City.

The existing buildings, constructed by French Catholicism, include the catholic chief church built in 1914 and the cathedral built in 1917. The whole church follows the European style, adopting French Romanesque architecture technique. The church takes up an area of 1,585 square meters, and is 45 meters high. It has a long cross-shaped layout. There are three tall towers standing at the apexes of a triangle, at the front and the back of the church. The pedestals of the towers are built by laying yellow and red bricks, with emerald cyrtostyle spires at the top. There are semicircular arched windows below the eaves. There are three corridors inside with luxury colored frescoes on the inner wall.

The Xikai Church is the largest church in Tianjin, and it can accommodate many adherents. Now it is still the local center of Catholic activities ('Xikai Church' 2003, China Culture website http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_aboutchina/2003-09/24/content_25584.htm – Accessed 12 December 2006 – Attachment 12).

The Discover Tianjin website lists Wesley Church on the corner of Bin Jiang Rd and He Bei as a significant historic building in Tianjin ('List of 160 Significant Historic Buildings in Tianjin – 1' 2000, Discover Tianjin website <http://www.wayabroad.com/tianjin/text/text45.htm> – Accessed 12 December 2006 – Attachment 13).

4. Is there any evidence that a person who had been in trouble with the authorities would be refused entry into a registered church?

No evidence that a person who had been in trouble with the authorities would be refused entry into a registered church was found amongst the sources consulted.

Tony Lambert, an expert on Christian groups in China and author of China's Christian Millions (2006), was contacted in regard to this matter on 12 December 2006 (RRT Country Research 2006, Email to Tony Lambert 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN31083)', 12 December – Attachment 4).

Tony Lambert replied on 15 December 2006. The information is as follows:

I find this question a little odd. If the person in question were an unregistered HOUSE-church believer, the government might well intervene and arrest/caution him/her for distributing foreign Christian literature as 'subversive, anti-China etc etc', and ban them going to an unregistered and therefore technically illegal house-church. However, as the government wants all Christians to attend the State-registered (Three Self) 'open' churches where it can keep an eye on them it is unlikely they would ban a Christian from attending a registered State church or meeting-point (Lambert, Tony 2006, Email 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN31083)', 15 December – Attachment 5).

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5. Are underground Christian churches formed along the lines of a particular denomination or are they simply generic?

According to Tears of the Oppressed, a Christian human rights organisation, unregistered Christians in China can be loosely classified under the following categories:

- 'Underground' or unregistered Protestant Christians (of various denominations known to the West, e.g. Baptist, as well as denominations unique to China, and some claiming no particular denomination.)
- 'Underground' or unregistered Catholic Christians, who allegiance is to the Vatican, rather than the Communist Party (Tears of the Oppressed 2004, *Brief: Christians in China – For the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Eighth Australia-China Human Rights Dialogue*, October, p.2 – Attachment 14).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/refinfo_e

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

US Congressional-Executive Commission on China <http://www.cecc.gov/>

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

United Nations (UN)

UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

Non-Government Organisations

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

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

International News & Politics

The Christian Science Monitor <http://www.csmonitor.com/>

Compass Direct <http://www.compassdirect.org/>

World Evangelical Alliance <http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/>

Worthy News <http://www.worthynews.com/>

Topic Specific Links

China Culture <http://www.chinaculture.org/>

Discover Tianjin <http://www.wayabroad.com/>

Search Engines

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

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2006, *Annual Report 2006*, 20 September.
2. US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report 2006 – China*, 15 September.
3. Crowell, Todd 1994, 'The Great Awakening: China's Religious Revival', *Asiaweek*, 17 August. (CISNET China CX4523)
4. RRT Country Research 2006, Email to Tony Lambert 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN31083)', 12 December.
5. Lambert, Tony 2006, Email 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN31083)', 15 December.
6. Freedom House 2002, *Report Analyzing Seven Secret Chinese Government Documents*, 11 February.
7. International Coalition for Religious Freedom 2004, *Religious Freedom in China*, 10 May.
8. Davenport, Paul 2000, 'Making Theology Compatible With Socialism', *Worthy News*, source: *Compass Direct*, 17 November <http://www.worthynews.com/news-features/compass-china-socialism.html> – Accessed 12 December 2006.
9. Davenport, Paul 2001, 'China's "Theological Construction" Campaign Intensifies', *Compass Direct*, 17 July, World Evangelical Alliance website http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/textonly/3persec_china_17jul01.html – Accessed 12 December 2006.
10. 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.
11. RRT Country Research 2006, Email to China Ministries International 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN31083)', 12 December.
12. 'Xikai Church' 2003, China Culture website http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_aboutchina/2003-09/24/content_25584.htm – Accessed 12 December 2006.
13. 'List of 160 Significant Historic Buildings in Tianjin – 1' 2000, Discover Tianjin website <http://www.wayabroad.com/tianjin/text/text45.htm> – Accessed 12 December 2006.
14. Tears of the Oppressed 2004, *Brief: Christians in China – For the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Eighth Australia-China Human Rights Dialogue*, October.