

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Is there any information on the New Life Church?**
- 2. Are there any reports of arrests of members of this church in Zhengzhou, Henan or elsewhere in China?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Is there any information on the New Life Church?**
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No information on a New Life Church in Henan province led by a He Yingjie, or a Ying Jie (John) He, from Singapore was found in the sources consulted.

However, there is a church known by a wide variety of names including New Birth Church, Born Again Movement and Full Scope Church founded by Peter Xu Yongze (Yongzhe, Yongzi). “New Birth” and “Born Again” might be a transliteral variation of “New Life”. It is of interest that information accessed on the Chinese English Dictionary website indicates the same Chinese character for “birth”, “born” and “life”:

生 shēng to be born / to give birth / life / to grow (‘Born’ (undated), Chinese English Dictionary website <http://www.chinese-tools.com/tools/dictionary.html> – Accessed 23 August 2007 – Attachment 1).

The church founded by Xu Yongze began in Henan and has spread to a number of provinces in China. It is a banned “cult” in China. Although recent reports of arrests of members were

not found in the sources consulted there are reported arrests in the 1990s and into the 2000s of church members in Henan, Hunan and Anhui provinces.

Church Names

A wide range of names for the church founded by Peter Xu Yongze was found in the sources consulted. Reported names of the church are (in alphabetical order):

- All Range Church (Ma, Josephine 2003, 'Police crack down on underground religion', *South China Morning Post*, 21 January – Attachment 2).
- Born Again Movement (Wesley, Luke 2004, 'Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, p.230 <http://www.ajps.edu/ajps/04-2/04-2-LWesley.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2007 – Attachment 3; Ma, Josephine 2003, 'Police crack down on underground religion', *South China Morning Post*, 21 January – Attachment 2; Becker, Jasper 2002, 'Suppression fails to snuff out appeal of underground sects', *South China Morning Post*, 9 January – Attachment 4).
- Criers (Wesley, Luke 2004, 'Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, p.237 <http://www.ajps.edu/ajps/04-2/04-2-LWesley.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2007 – Attachment 3).
- Crying Faction (*Ku Pai*) (Amnesty International 2000, *People's Republic of China. The Crackdown on Falun Gong and Other So-Called "Heretical Organizations"*, 23 March, ASA 17/11/20, p.11 – Attachment 5).
- Full Circle (*Quanfanwei*) ('China detains 47 protestants accused of illegal sect' 2000, *Agence France-Presse*, 3 May – Attachment 6; Human Rights Watch 2000, *World Report 2001*, December, p.185 – Attachment 7).
- Full Scope Church ('Persecution of the Christian Underground in China: Conclusions of the Puebla Program on Religious Freedom' 1997, Center for Religious Freedom website, 6 June http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion/country/china/china_persecution.htm – Accessed 19 May 2004 – Attachment 8; US Department of State 1998, *China: Profile of Asylum Claims and Country Conditions*, 14 April, p.9 – Attachment 9).
- Holistic Church (*Quanfanwei Jiao*). However, in March 2000 Amnesty International also noted that it was not clear whether *Quanfanwei Jiao* is a faction of the Born Again Movement, another name for it or a separate group (Amnesty International 2000, *People's Republic of China. The Crackdown on Falun Gong and Other So-Called "Heretical Organizations"*, 23 March, ASA 17/11/20, p.11 – Attachment 5).
- New Birth Church (Wesley, Luke 2004, 'Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, p.236/footnote 19 <http://www.ajps.edu/ajps/04-2/04-2-LWesley.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2007 – Attachment 3; 'Persecution of the Christian Underground in China: Conclusions of the Puebla Program on Religious Freedom' 1997, Center for Religious Freedom website, 6 June

http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion/country/china/china_persecution.htm – Accessed 19 May 2004 – Attachment 8; ‘Charges of religious persecution ‘groundless’ 1997, *South China Morning Post*, 10 June – Attachment 10).

- Rebirth Faction/ Born Again Movement (*Chongsheng Pai*) (Amnesty International 2000, *People’s Republic of China. The Crackdown on Falun Gong and Other So-Called “Heretical Organizations”*, 23 March, ASA 17/11/20, p.11 – Attachment 5).
- Total Scope Church (Ma, Josephine 2003, ‘Police crack down on underground religion’, *South China Morning Post*, 21 January – Attachment 2).
- Way of Fate (‘China detains 47 protestants accused of illegal sect’ 2000, *Agence France-Presse*, 3 May – Attachment 6).
- Way of Life (Wesley, Luke 2004, ‘Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?’, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, p.236/footnote 19 <http://www.ajps.edu/ajps/04-2/04-2-LWesley.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2007 – Attachment 3).
- Weepers (‘China detains 47 protestants accused of illegal sect’ 2000, *Agence France-Presse*, 3 May – Attachment 6).
- Word of Life Church (Wesley, Luke 2004, ‘Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?’, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, pp.230,236-238 <http://www.ajps.edu/ajps/04-2/04-2-LWesley.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2007 – Attachment 3).

For the purposes of this RRT Research and Information Research the name of the church is as stated in the source document.

Origins

According to Wesley the origins of the Word of Life Church can be traced to 1968 when Peter Xu began preaching in his hometown in southern Henan. By 1979 the ministry was reaching into other areas of Henan. In 1982 evangelists were being sent to other provinces. The first teams were sent to Sichuan province, a number of which were arrested and returned to Henan. The church persevered in Sichuan and it became a major centre of the ministry. By 1988 over 3,000 churches were said to have been planted (Wesley, Luke 2004, ‘Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?’, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, p.236 <http://www.ajps.edu/ajps/04-2/04-2-LWesley.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2007 – Attachment 3).

Information accessed on the Center for Religious Freedom website, dated 1997, noted that Peter Xu Yongze was “perhaps the most important underground Protestant leader in China” (‘Persecution of the Christian Underground in China: Conclusions of the Puebla Program on Religious Freedom’ 1997, Center for Religious Freedom website, 6 June http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion/country/china/china_persecution.htm – Accessed 19 May 2004 – Attachment 8).

Hunter and Chan write in their 1993 book that Xu Yongzhe and other leaders of his group were Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution who had converted to Christianity. They state that the group had an efficient clandestine organisation, received financial assistance from Hong Kong and printed their own material (Hunter, Alan and Chan, Kim-Kwong, 1993, *Protestantism in Contemporary China*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.65/ footnote 62 – Attachment 11).

In 2002 Becker wrote that Xu Yongze had helped establish a network of 3,500 house-churches in Henan with branches in 20 other provinces (Becker, Jasper 2002, 'Suppression fails to snuff out appeal of underground sects', *South China Morning Post*, 9 January – Attachment 4).

However, in 2003 Tony Lambert wrote on the reliability of estimates as follows:

...The Born Again Movement claims to be one of the largest groups, with some 8,000 full-time evangelists and 15,000 voluntary workers. Some observers say this group has 4-8 million members; other estimates are as high as 23 million. Which figures are closer to the truth? (Lambert, Tony 2003, 'Counting Christians in China: A cautionary report', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 1 January – Attachment 12).

The founder, Peter Xu, was first arrested and imprisoned in 1982; however, he was able to escape from the labour camp and resumed his ministry. He was re-arrested in 1988, 1997 and released in 2000. He now lives in the USA (Wesley, Luke 2004, 'Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, p.236 <http://www.ajps.edu/ajps/04-2/04-2-LWesley.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2007 – Attachment 3; McGeown, Kate 2004, 'China's Christians suffer for their faith', *BBC News*, 9 November <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3993857.stm> – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 13).

On Xu Yongze's arrests Amnesty International wrote in 2000:

The founder of this group, Xu Yongze, has been accused by the authorities of advocating the "doomsday theory" and inciting believers to cry loudly as a form of repentance so that they could be reformed and born again. He has been imprisoned or assigned to re-education through labour many times for his religious activities. According to the government, Xu was last sentenced in Zhengzhou City, Henan province, in December 1997 to three years' imprisonment for "disturbing social order." See footnote 17 17 The case attracted international attention, and the government's justifications for his imprisonment have been widely contested by members of foreign based evangelical groups familiar with Xu's work...(Amnesty International 2000, *People's Republic of China. The Crackdown on Falun Gong and Other So-Called "Heretical Organizations"*, 23 March, ASA 17/11/20, p.11 – Attachment 5).

Beliefs

Wesley writes that the Word of Life bases its theology on John 3:3-5 and emphasises that the only way to eternal life is to repent and have a new birth in Jesus. The church has been criticised for supposedly emphasising that believers must cry for a prolonged period of time to be truly saved. However, Peter Xu and other leaders insist that crying is not a requirement for salvation (Wesley, Luke 2004, 'Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?', *Asian*

Journal of Pentecostal Studies, Vol.7, No.2, pp.236-237 <http://www.aps.edu/ajps/04-2/04-2-LWesley.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2007 – Attachment 3).

In respect of crying for prolonged periods of time the *South China Morning Post* reported that the New Birth Church preaches that people have to cry for three days and nights before they can be reborn as Christians. Another view of the crying is in *Time* which reported that Peter Xu Yongze's Christianity required new converts to weep for three days as way to cleanse their sins ('Charges of religious persecution 'groundless' 1997, *South China Morning Post*, 10 June – Attachment 10; FlorCruz, Jaime A. and Ramo, Joshua Cooper 1999, 'Inside China's Search For Its Soul', *Time*, 26 September <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,31503,00.html> – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 14).

According to Wesley a leader of the group has stated:

- They do not encourage speaking in tongues. Although this may rarely happen, it is not really encouraged and a small element in the group would see it as demonic.
- They emphasize healing, but they do not practice prophecy or speaking in tongues.
- They do emphasize the importance of the Spirit's power in their lives, especially in evangelism and ministry. And, although they might connect this with baptism in the Spirit, this appears to be an area where their theology is not clearly developed. They appear to be open to the Spirit's empowering after conversion, but whether they would describe this as a definite experience available to everyone or connect this with Acts 2 is not clear. My friend did say said they did not emphasize the term, "baptism in the Holy Spirit." (Wesley, Luke 2004, 'Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, p.2388 <http://www.aps.edu/ajps/04-2/04-2-LWesley.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2007 – Attachment 3).

The evangelists have developed a "seven point missions" strategy:

- Preach the salvation of the cross in order to make sure one repents and experiences the new birth.
- Take the way of the cross to persevere in faith during suffering.
- Recognize that the TSPM embraces a worldly authority.
- Plant churches (this is the goal of evangelism)
- Build up spiritual life (through spiritual life training)
- Build up fellowship (fellowship in church and with co-workers)
- Grow through planting churches (send out evangelists, plant churches, and establish Bible schools) (Wesley, Luke 2004, 'Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, p.237 <http://www.aps.edu/ajps/04-2/04-2-LWesley.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2007 – Attachment 3).

Arrests

Sources indicate that the church is one of the religious groups targeted by the authorities. The few reports of specific arrests of church members found in the sources consulted have been in Henan, Hunan and Anhui.

The US Department of State reported in 2007 that the authorities continued a general crackdown on groups that it considered to be "cults" which included the Full Scope Church. It stated:

The authorities continued a general crackdown on groups considered to be “cults.”

These “cults” included not only Falun Gong and various traditional Chinese meditation and exercise groups (known collectively as qigong groups), but also religious groups that authorities accused of preaching beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrine. Groups that the government labeled cults included Eastern Lightning, the Servants of Three Classes, the Shouters, the South China Church, the Association of Disciples, **the Full Scope Church**, the Spirit Sect, the New Testament Church, the Way of the Goddess of Mercy, the Lord God Sect, the Established King Church, the Unification Church, and the Family of Love. Authorities accused some in these groups of lacking proper theological training, preaching the imminent coming of the apocalypse or holy war, or exploiting the reemergence of religion for personal gain. The government accused the Eastern Lightning group and some other unregistered Christian groups of involvement in violence (US Department of State 2007, ‘Freedom of Religion’ in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006 – China*, 6 March – Attachment 15).

According to the 2002 Becker news article the Born Again Movement was one of over a dozen groups targeted by the authorities (Becker, Jasper 2002, ‘Suppression fails to snuff out appeal of underground sects’, *South China Morning Post*, 9 January – Attachment 4).

It was also stated in a 2003 *South China Morning Post* news article that the Henan police had launched a crackdown on the Total Scope Church and several leaders reportedly arrested. Ma wrote that the *China Daily* reported that meetings of church followers were raided in December 2002 and January 2003 in Chuandong, Qiliping and Xiaguang towns in Henan province and 176 followers “‘dealt with’”. The total number arrested was unclear (Ma, Josephine 2003, ‘Police crack down on underground religion’, *South China Morning Post*, 21 January – Attachment 2).

Sources have reported the arrests of church members in Anhui province in 2000. The US State Department reported:

...According to the Jianghuai Morning Daily in Anhui Province, on April 9, police detained 47 members of the unregistered Full Scope Church, whose leader, Xu Yongze, was released from prison only in May, although his 3-year sentence ended in March. Although he was released from a labor camp, it is unclear whether Xu remains subject to some restrictions. According to the newspaper, six church leaders were to face criminal charges for organizing an “illegal sect,” while eight others likely would receive “administrative” (usually meaning reeducation-through-labor) sentences. The Government’s 1997 White Paper on Religious Freedom stated that Xu had violated the law by promoting a cult, preaching that the Apocalypse was near, and asking worshipers to wait in public spaces for several consecutive days. Group members deny these charges. Xu’s colleagues Qin Baocai and Mu Sheng are believed to continue to serve reeducation-through-labor sentences...(US Department of State 2001, ‘Freedom of Religion’ in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000 – China*, February – Attachment 16).

The *Agence France-Presse* and the Washington Director of the US House Committee on International Relations have also reported the 2000 Anhui arrests (‘China detains 47 protestants accused of illegal sect’ 2000, *Agence France-Presse*, 3 May – Attachment 6; Jendrzeczyk, Mike 2000, ‘Granting Permanent Normal Trade Relations (NTR) Status To China: Is It In The US National Interest?’, *Congressional Testimony by Federal Document Clearing House*, 10 May – Attachment 17).

Amnesty International reported arrests in Hunan province of Holistic Church members in November 1999:

...It is not clear whether the Quanfanwei jiao (Holistic Church) is a faction of the same group or another name for it, or a separate group. **On 19 November 1999, Liu Guihua and 74 unnamed persons were detained in Xiangtan County, Hunan Province, as alleged members of the Quanfanwei Jiao.** The Quanfanwei Jiao has been repeatedly labelled a “heretical organization” by government representatives (Amnesty International 2000, *People’s Republic of China. The Crackdown on Falun Gong and Other So-Called “Heretical Organizations”*, 23 March, ASA 17/11/20, p.11 – Attachment 5).

List of Sources Consulted

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

China Aid Association <http://www.chinaaid.org/> <http://www.chinaaid.org/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

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

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China Study Journal 2007, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Spring/Summer Kindopp, Jason and Hamrin, Carol Lee (eds) 2004, *God and Caesar in China*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C.

Overmyer, Daniel L. (ed) 2003, ‘Religion in China Today’, *The China Quarterly*, Special Issues, New Series, No. 3, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

List of Attachments

1. ‘Born’ (undated), Chinese English Dictionary website <http://www.chinese-tools.com/tools/dictionary.html> – Accessed 23 August 2007.
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6. 'China detains 47 protestants accused of illegal sect' 2000, *Agence France-Presse*, 3 May. (FACTIVA)
7. Human Rights Watch 2000, *World Report 2001*, December, p.185. (MRT-RRT Library)
8. 'Persecution of the Christian Underground in China: Conclusions of the Puebla Program on Religious Freedom' 1997, Center for Religious Freedom website, 6 June http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion/country/china/china_persecution.htm – Accessed 19 May 2004.
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