

**Refugee Review Tribunal
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RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please provide information outlining the major differences between Shouters and the 'Meeting Place' church in Fujian.**
- 2. Please advise whether the 'Meeting Place' church is subjected to the adverse attention of the authorities in Fujian and also in China generally.**

RESPONSE

Preliminary note:

No information was found in the sources consulted on the Meeting Place Church. From the sources consulted, the "Meeting Place Church" appears to refer to the Little Flock group from which the Local Church (Shouters) evolved. In this RRT Research & Information response information is provided in respect of the Little Flock.

Information accessed on the website of the Ricci Institute at the University of San Francisco lists other names for Little Flock (小群) as Assembly Hall Church, Xiaoqun (小群), Juhuichu (聚會處) and Juhuisuo (聚會所) ('Ricci 21st Century Roundtable Database on the History of Christianity in China – Little Flock 小群' (undated), Ricci Institute website <http://ricci.rt.usfca.edu/institution/view.aspx?institutionID=361> – Accessed 14 January 2009 – Attachment 2).

The Little Flock has also been referred to as the Christian Assembly/Assemblies, the Assembly Hall/Church as well as the Local Church (May, Grace 1996, 'A Comparative Study of The Christian Assembly, the True Jesus Church, and the Jesus Family: Three

Ecclesial Case Studies of Protestantism in China', 1996 Orlando Costas Consultation on Global Mission, Modernization, the Church and the East Asian Experience Conference Paper, 15-16 March, p.15/footnote 2, Boston Theological Institute website <http://www.drsc.com/clients/bti/progs/imep/costas96.htm> – Accessed 4 February 1997 – Attachment 3; Human Rights Watch/Asia 1994, *China: Persecution of a Protestant Sect*, June, Vol. 6, No. 6, p.2 – Attachment 4).

Some commentators do not distinguish between the Shouters, Local Church, Assemblies and Little Flock.

Aikman in *Jesus in Beijing* writes:

In the 1990s, the “Shouters” group, also known as the Local Church, was harshly and vigorously suppressed. The Local Church (or Little Flock) emerged from the teaching and ministry of Watchman Nee (1903-19720) (sic), Ni Tuosheng in Chinese, certainly the most influential Chinese Christian teacher of the twentieth century... (Aikman, David 2003, *Jesus in Beijing*, Regnery Publishing Inc, Washington, p.237 – Attachment 5).

Freedom House noted:

The “Shouters” is the name given to Witness Lee (Li Chang-shou)’s followers in China. They are normally known as the “Local Church,” or “Assembly Hall” (by foreigners)... (Freedom House 2002, *Report Analyzing Seven Secret Chinese Government Documents*, 11 February, p.17/footnote 15 – Attachment 6).

Lambert has advised:

Alternative name for the Shouters are Yellers. the chinese (sic) term is *Huhanpai*. They also call themselves Local Church (*difang jiaohui*) or Assemblies (*jujuichu*). It is difficult for the authorities to distinguish them from more orthodox followers of Watchman Nee who died a martyr in Anhui labour-camp in 1972...(Lambert, Tony 1999, Email to the RRT: ‘Reply from Tony Lambert on Shouters’, 23 November – Attachment 7).

In his later publication *China’s Christian Millions*, however, Lambert has made the distinction between the Shouters and the Little Flock. He states:

The first cult to make nationwide impact in China were the ‘Shouters’ in the early 1980s. An offshoot of the biblically-based ‘Little Flock’ founded by Watchman Nee in the 1930s, the ‘Shouters’ looked for inspiration to Witness Lee, Watchman Nee’s Chief lieutenant...(Lambert, Tony 2006, *China’s Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, p.122 – Attachment 8).

According to Kindopp, the Shouters (Local Church) traces its origins to the Little Flock founded by Ni Tuosheng (Watchman Nee [Ni] in English) in the 1920s. The Local Church (Shouters) emerged under the leadership of Li Changshou (Witness Lee [Li] in English). The Chinese authorities first banned the Local Church in the early 1980s, pejoratively labelling it the “Shouter Sect” (*huhan pai*) (Kindopp, Jason 2004, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, Chapt. 9: The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant Sect, p.430 – Attachment 9).

1. Please provide information outlining the major differences between Shouters and the 'Meeting Place' church in Fujian.

Definitive information on major differences between the Little Flock and Shouters was not found in the sources consulted. Country information indicates that the Local Church (Shouters) which emerged under Li Changshou (Witness Lee [Li] in English), traces its origins to the Little Flock founded by Ni Tuosheng (Watchman Nee [Ni] in English) in the 1920s. The beliefs and practices of the Shouters appear to have evolved from the Little Flock's beliefs and practices. However, sources suggest that the Little Flock may use bibles and hymn books printed by the state and the Shouters may use the *Recovery Bible*.

Kindopp writes that Li Changshou was a former Little Flock lieutenant (and close personal friend of Ni Tuosheng) who emigrated to Taiwan in 1949 with a few Little Flock leaders. In Taiwan he quickly built up the group. Li emigrated to the United States in 1962. Li Changshou built on the Little Flock's anti-denominational localism, doctrinal spiritualism and fervent evangelism to further systematise the group's platform. According to Kindopp "Li developed a cogent belief system by systematizing the Little Flock's narrowly spiritualistic understanding of the Bible and developing new rituals for obtaining spiritual purity". The Local Church re-entered China claiming to represent the culmination of Ni Tuosheng's "'recovery' of Christianity". Local Church missionaries have been particularly successful in attracting Little Flock members. Little Flock strongholds were said to be in Fujian, Zhejiang and Guangdong (Kindopp, Jason 2004, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, Chapt. 9: The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant Sect, pp.430,436,449-452 – Attachment 9).

Although an early 1994 Human Rights Watch report noted that Ni Tuosheng and Witness Li differed on tactics and doctrine, these differences were not identified in the report (Human Rights Watch/Asia 1994, *China: Persecution of a Protestant Sect*, June, Vol. 6, No. 6, p.2 – Attachment 4).

A December 2003 *South China Morning Post* news article reporting on a Little Flock assembly in a village Zhejiang province stated that:

Bibles and hymn books used by the group are printed by the state church. Followers used the former church building, although it was unregistered, for several years (Savadove, Bill 2003, 'Little Flock is resisting state control from pastures new', *South China Morning Post*, 1 December – Attachment 10).

On Local Church bibles Kindopp wrote:

...Under Li's supervision, the Local Church re-translated the entire Bible, equipped with Li's extensive commentary throughout the text (entitled *the Recovery Bible*). Li also takes credit for authoring a 25,000 page study guide and commentary of the Bible, along with over 200 pamphlets, taped conferences, and other titles (Kindopp, Jason 2004, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, Chapt. 9: The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant Sect, p.437 – Attachment 9).

According to Kindopp, Ni Tuosheng in his only publication of systematic theology, *The Spiritual Man*, stated his theory that man is made up of three spheres, body, soul and spirit. The spirit holds the key to salvation. Kindopp continues:

...Ni also amalgamated aspects of Christianity with traditional Chinese notions of spirituality, holding that man's spirit mingles freely with the divine, and that true oneness with God comes not from a rational understanding of His purposes, but through intuitive encounters with the Spirit.

In the realm of church organization, Ni sought to return to a simple New Testament pattern of worship and ministry, proposing a "one locale, one church" formula. Also consistent with Chinese sensibilities, Ni's proposal for church organization was at once localistic and universal. He writes:

"One church for several localities, or several churches in one locality – both are not ordained of God. God's Word clearly reveals that one locality can have only one church, and there can only be one church in one locality. To have one church in several localities demands a unity which the Bible does not demand; to have several churches in one locality divides the oneness which the Bible demands."

Consequently, Ni sought to eradicate the clerical structure of establishment Protestantism, proposing that church members elect "elders" to exercise authority over the church but eschew paid clergy. To counter the centripetal forces of organizational decentralism and utopian egalitarianism, Ni demanded a firm authoritarianism in deciding church matters. He coined the term "God's deputy authority" for reinforcement, claiming that properly selected church leaders enjoyed complete divine backing (Kindopp, Jason 2004, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, Chapt. 9: The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant Sect, p.434 – Attachment 9).

Kindopp stated that Li kept the Little Flock's "one locale, one church" formula and systematised and "further developed the Little Flock's anti-bureaucratic principles and theological emphasis on subjective experience" (Kindopp, Jason 2004, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, Chapt. 9: The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant Sect, pp.436-437 – Attachment 9).

In a May 2006 article Tony Lambert wrote that when Witness Lee moved to the US in 1962 he was "free to develop the Local Church as a tightly-knit organization". Some Little Flock members saw Lee's moves as being towards "an increasingly authoritarian and sectarian religion" (Lambert, Tony 2006, 'House-Church Networks: An Overview', *Global Chinese Ministries Newsletter*, March, April, May, Part 1 http://www.omf.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/ – Accessed 20 July 2007 – Attachment 11).

Lambert continued:

...In general, older Little Flock leaders on the Mainland have kept to the milder ways laid down by Watchman Nee and denounced Lee's teachings as divisive, even heretical... (Lambert, Tony 2006, 'House-Church Networks: An Overview', *Global Chinese Ministries Newsletter*, March, April, May, Part 1 http://www.omf.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/ – Accessed 20 July 2007 – Attachment 11).

Kindopp noted that Li Changshou accepted Ni Tuosheng's tripartite notion that each individual is divided into flesh, soul and spirit. Li held that the "flesh is utterly sinful and the soul has been corrupted into selfcenteredness" (Kindopp, Jason 2004, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, Chapt. 9: The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant Sect, pp.439-440 – Attachment 9).

Kindopp continued that, as with Ni, Li's thinking on spiritual matters appeared to meld the fundamentalist Protestant Christianity doctrines with traditional Chinese ideas of spirituality (Kindopp, Jason 2004, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, Chapt. 9: The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant Sect, p.442 – Attachment 9).

According to Kindopp:

...Millenarian overtones are also evident within the [Local Church] group, as members clearly believe that the works of Ni and Li constitute God's "final revelation" to mankind, that Jesus' Second Coming is at hand, and that Local Church adherents will play a unique role in the first 1,000 years of God's new reign... (Kindopp, Jason 2004, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, Chapt. 9: The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant Sect, p.481 – Attachment 9).

Kindopp also stated that following Li's death (in 1997), the Local Church began to reassess his more extreme doctrines and to reaffirm the initial insights of Ni Tuosheng, "whose spiritual writings remain popular throughout the evangelical Protestant world" (Kindopp, Jason 2004, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, Chapt. 9: The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant Sect, pp.445,466-467 – Attachment 9).

For further information on the beliefs and practices of the Local Church (Shouters) and the Little Flock see question 1F (pp.5-6) in the attached RRT *Research Response CHN13854* (RRT Country Research 1999, *Research Response CHN13854*, 17 December, quest. 1F/pp.5-6 – Attachment 12).

2. Please advise whether the 'Meeting Place' church is subjected to the adverse attention of the authorities in Fujian and also in China generally.

No information was found in the sources consulted on whether the Little Flock was subjected to adverse attention by the authorities in Fujian province. More generally, there are 2003-2004 reports of Little Flock members receiving adverse attention in Zhejiang. There are also reports that some Little Flock groups have become registered churches and meet on registered church premises. However, other Little Flock groups have not registered with the Chinese authorities. In China the treatment of religious groups vary greatly from region to region.

With respect to Fujian, Tony Lambert in his 2006 publication writes:

The “Little Flock” or “Assemblies” were started by Watchman Nee in the 1930s and are still very strong in Fujian, especially in the Fuzhou and Fuqing areas where they number many thousands. Many of them prefer to have no links with the TSPM [Three-Self Patriotic Movement]. In Xiamen at least one-third of the believers meet in over 100 independent house churches, according to a knowledgeable Hong Kong Christian...(Lambert, Tony 2006, *China’s Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, p.241 – Attachment 13).

In another publication Lambert noted that Fuqing in Fujian may have about 100,000 Little Flock believers worshipping in its assemblies (Lambert, Tony 2006, ‘House-Church Networks: An Overview’, *Global Chinese Ministries Newsletter*, March, April, May, Part 1 http://www.omf.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/ – Accessed 20 July 2007 – Attachment 11).

In relation to China generally, Tang, writing in the *China Study Journal* in 2008, noted that the Little Flock has re-appeared in China. He states that many autonomous denominations, including the Little Flock, that have refused to join the official churches for theological or political reasons, “thrive” outside the Three-Self Patriotic Movement/China Christian Council (TSPM/CCC) structures (Tang, Edmond 2008, ‘The changing landscape of Chinese Christianity’, *China Study Journal*, Spring/Summer – Attachment 14).

Also, a December 2003 news article states:

In a rarity for China, some Little Flock assemblies in Zhejiang have registered but remain outside of the so-called Three Selves movement, or the state-sponsored church...(Savadove, Bill 2003, ‘Little Flock is resisting state control from pastures new’, *South China Morning Post*, 1 December – Attachment 10).

In a May 2006 article Lambert also wrote:

Some Little Flock Christians have accepted Three Self oversight and meet on Three Self church premises – while still jealously guarding their own traditions such as “breaking of bread” and believers’ baptism. Many others prefer to meet independently in house churches. The movement has been very conservative, enforcing head-coverings for women. Pastors are not accepted, but each assembly has certain elders or “leading brethren.”

...

According to Three Self statistics published in 2005, about 200,000 believers in 20 provinces were led astray by the Shouters’ false teaching in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Shouters have been persecuted and their leaders imprisoned, so their influence may have lessened. However, the Shouters have proved a fertile seed-bed for more extreme cults such as the Established King, The Lord God Cult and Eastern Lightning.

Today the more orthodox Little Flock assemblies flourish throughout China as independent house churches. Xiaoshan in Zhejiang and Fuqing in Fujian each may have about 100,000 Little Flock believers worshipping in their own assemblies (Lambert, Tony 2006, ‘House-Church Networks: An Overview’, *Global Chinese Ministries Newsletter*, March, April, May, Part 1 http://www.omf.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/ – Accessed 20 July 2007 – Attachment 11).

In respect of provinces other than Fujian Lambert writes:

In northern Zhejiang Province, Xiaoshan County is home to large numbers of Little Flock Christians who remain adamantly opposed to joining the TSPM. In 1984 the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences conducted an investigation of Christianity in Xiaoshan. They

concluded that more than 95 per cent of the 63,000 Christians in Xiaoshan belonged to the Little Flock; that they were all opposed to joining the “Three Self” so met independently; but that they showed every sign of being patriotic citizens in every other respect. Two years later numbers had grown to 80,000 of whom 75 per cent were still outside TSPM control. In 1998 local Christians reported that numbers had grown to 100,000 (some even to 300,000).

The staggering growth of the Little Flock in Xiaoshan can be traced back to a small group of Christian families “migrating” from Shandong Province to the area in 1949-1950. During the Cultural Revolution great persecution came upon them, but in the late 1970s this was followed by a great spiritual awakening. House churches sprang up everywhere. Since 1994 when registration of all meetings was first enforced by the authorities they have been engaged in a constant spiritual battle. Many meeting places have been demolished, then rebuilt, only to be demolished and rebuilt again! Because of the large number of Christians the authorities have more recently taken a more conciliatory line. On 24 December 1996 the local *Xiaoshan Daily* reported that 174 meeting places had been officially registered. Unusually, they appear to have allowed house churches to register directly with the government without having to join the TSPM.

The direct headship of Christ over each local assembly is a truth upheld strongly by the Little Flock. Some have said that they will never register nor accept government and TSPM interference in spiritual matters even if their buildings are demolished; others resolutely oppose joining the TSPM which they consider to be apostate, but are willing to register with the local authorities. Such debates are common in house church circles far beyond Little Flock assemblies. It appears that the Little Flock have had a widespread influence. Their emphasis on the headship of Christ, on fellowship, and on eschatology and separation from the world are generally accepted by many Chinese Christians, especially those who meet in independent houses churches (Lambert, Tony 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, pp.64-65 – Attachment 15).

News articles in 2003-2004 reported a crackdown in Zhejiang province on Little Flock churches on the edge of Hangzhou and in Xiaoshan. A November 2003 *The Times* news article reported a police raid on a Little Flock church in Xiaoshan and arrested three leaders. One December 2003 *South China Morning Post* article reported a crackdown on a Little Flock group in a village on the edge of Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. The village Little Flock group was said to be fighting state control and refused to register with the authorities. However, another *South China Morning Post* article, dated February 2004, noted that Hangzhou local officials had a history of confrontation with the “unregistered” Little Flock group dating back to the 1950s (August, Oliver 2003, ‘China destroys churches and temples in crackdown on underground’, *The Times*, 10 November – Attachment 16; Savadove, Bill 2003, ‘Little Flock is resisting state control from pastures new’, *South China Morning Post*, 1 December – Attachment 10; Chou, Nailene 2004 ‘Temple fire leads to crackdown on religious activity’, *South China Morning Post*, 19 February – Attachment 17).

Also, the US Department of State has reported that “the treatment of religious groups varied significantly from region to region” (US Department of State 2008, ‘Legal/Policy Framework’ in *International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – China*, 19 September – Attachment 18).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

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

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

OMF International <http://www.omf.org/>

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. RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response CHN31627*, 19 April.
2. 'Ricci 21st Century Roundtable Database on the History of Christianity in China – Little Flock 小群' (undated), Ricci Institute website
<http://ricci.rt.usfca.edu/institution/view.aspx?institutionID=361> – Accessed 14 January 2009.
3. May, Grace 1996, 'A Comparative Study of The Christian Assembly, the True Jesus Church, and the Jesus Family: Three Ecclesial Case Studies of Protestantism in China', 1996 Orlando Costas Consultation on Global Mission, Modernization, the Church and the East Asian Experience Conference Paper, 15-16 March, Boston Theological Institute website
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6. Freedom House 2002, *Report Analyzing Seven Secret Chinese Government Documents*, 11 February.
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12. RRT Country Research 1999, *Research Response CHN13854*, 17 December.
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15. Lambert, Tony 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford. (MRT-RRT Library)
16. August, Oliver 2003, 'China destroys churches and temples in crackdown on underground', *The Times*, 10 November. (FACTIVA)
17. Chou, Nailene 2004 'Temple fire leads to crackdown on religious activity', *South China Morning Post*, 19 February. (FACTIVA)
18. US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – China*, 19 September.