

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: CHN30336
Country: China
Date: 11 July 2006

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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 any evidence of a PSB crackdown on the illegal Christian group, the Shouters, in Yan'An in Shaanxi Province around January 2006.**
- 2. What is the general attitude of the Chinese authorities to the Shouters?**
- 3. Please provide any evidence of Shouters or other illegal Christians being sent to labour camps from southern China around 2005-2006.**

RESPONSE

Please note that the Shouters (otherwise known as the Local Church or *huan pai*), founded by Li Changshou (otherwise known as Witness Lee), traces its origins to the Little Flock, founded by Ni Tuosheng in the late 1920s.

1. Please provide any evidence of a PSB crackdown on the illegal Christian group, the Shouters, in Yan'An in Shaanxi Province around January 2006.

No information on a PSB crackdown on the Shouters in Yan'An, Shaanxi around January 2006 was found amongst the sources consulted.

On 10 July 2006, Tony Lambert, an expert on Christian groups in China and author of *China's Christian Millions* (2006), was asked whether there was any evidence of a PSB crackdown on Shouters in China (RRT Country Research 2006, Email to Tony Lambert 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN30336)', 10 July – Attachment 1).

On 12 July 2006, Tony Lambert advised that he is "unaware of a particular current drive by the PSB against the Shouters":

The main cults under attack now are Eastern Lighting, and just recently Three Grades of Servants whose leaders face imminent execution. Shaanxi, particularly Ankang in the SW corner of the province may be a stronghold of the Mentuhui (Discipleship) group (Lambert, Tony 2006, Email 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN30336)', 12 July – Attachment 9).

2. What is the general attitude of the Chinese authorities to the Shouters?

Recent information on the Shouters in China is scarce. The responses and reports below indicate that the group remains banned and operate underground although a limited number of Local Church members have registered with local authorities. Sources also indicate that official repression continues.

Research Response CHN30207 dated 14 June 2006 and *Research Response CHN17561* dated 7 October 2005 provide information on the current situation of Shouters in China (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30207*, 14 June – Attachment 2; and RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response CHN17561*, 7 October – Attachment 3).

Jason Kindopp's PhD dissertation on Protestantism in contemporary China dated 16 May 2004 provides new information on the Local Church in China. According to Kindopp, there are an estimated 800,000 adherents in China today. Kindopp notes that the Local Church in China has shown "considerable resilience in the face of official repression." Kindopp notes that official repression is not uniform throughout China and that Local Churches now operate legally in Shanghai, Nanjing, Fuzhou, and a number of rural counties in Zhejiang and Fujian Provinces. Despite this, Kindopp notes that most congregations remain unregistered:

At the time of my research, the Chinese government were blocking the Local Church's website, but several urban church members claimed to have ways of accessing it anyway.

...Official repression of the Local Church continued throughout the 1990s and into the new century, although the regime's tactics have evolved over time. For the most part, lengthy judicial sentences have given way to short-term administrative detentions and large fines – often repeatedly upon unrepentant church figures. Authorities have also employed increasingly sophisticated methods of implementing the PSB's strategy of eradicating local congregations, in some cases dispatching moles who pretend to be Christians to infiltrate the groups to obtain information about its leaders and members and then report their findings to the police. Official attempts to re-educate Local Church adherents have also continued.

...Despite official repression, the Local Church has continued to grow in China, swelling to approximately 800,000 adherents by the late 1990s. Most congregations remain unregistered with political authorities, and the few that have registered have resisted coming under TPSPM [Three Patriotic Self Movement] control.

...Local Church publications – printed as near as South Korea and Taiwan – are smuggled into China through Hong Kong and Chinese ports along the eastern seaboard. Entire volumes are copied on to CD-ROMs, accessed to personal computers or even given to local private printing presses for mass reproduction. The materials are distributed through informal networks of Local Church adherents, many of who work full-time for the church and are willing to risk their personal freedom to achieve its objective.

...Official repression of the Local Church has not been uniform throughout the country, and the varied political environments have led to a divergence in the group's development.

...By contrast, political authorities in other locales have agreed to register Local Church congregations within their jurisdictions, as they have with other autonomous house churches. Local Churches now operate legally in Shanghai, Nanjing, Fuzhou, and a number of rural counties in Zhejiang and Fujian Provinces. ...Registration has often occurred in the face of TSPM opposition, although *lianghui* officials have also found it expedient to forge a *modus vivendi* with Local Church leaders, particularly in areas where Local Church adherents constitute a sizable minority or even a majority of Protestants (Kindopp, Jason 2004, 'The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant Sect', *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May, Chapter 9, pp.446-447, 455, 461, 463 & 466 – Attachment 4).

Tony Lambert was contacted in regards to this matter on 11 July 2006 (RRT Country Research 2006, Email to Tony Lambert 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN30336)', 11 July – Attachment 5).

An article dated 26 March 2006 on House-Church Networks in China edited by Tony Lambert of OMF International, provides information on the Little Flock and the Local Church in China. The article notes that the Shouters have been "ruthlessly suppressed".

Lee's supporters flooded Local Church house churches with his booklets and tracts. In 1983 the Chinese government labeled his followers a sect called the "Shouters" because of their practice of shouting Bible verses or slogans. More seriously, it was declared "reactionary"—a serious political accusation which no doubt was partly earned by Lee's close Taiwan connections. **It has been ruthlessly suppressed, and there is little doubt that many genuine believers have been wrongly accused.** 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. Some younger followers have enthusiastically followed Lee and risk arrest and even imprisonment.

...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 (Anderson, Stephen E & Lambert, Tony (ed.) 2006, 'House-Church Networks – An Overview (Part 1)', Cogitations Blog, 26 March <http://cogitations.typepad.com/cogitations/2006/03/index.html> – Accessed 7 July 2006 – Attachment 6).

3. Please provide any evidence of Shouters or other illegal Christians being sent to labour camps from southern China around 2005-2006.

No information on Shouters being sent to labour camps in 2005 or 2006 was found amongst the sources consulted. Illegal Christians continued to be arrested and/or detained in China in 2005 and 2006.

Tony Lambert was contacted in regards to this matter on 10 July 2006 (RRT Country Research 2006, Email to Tony Lambert 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN30336)', 10 July – Attachment 1).

On 12 July 2006, Tony Lambert advised that "unregistered house-churches have come under pressure in many places":

Certainly unregistered house-churches have come under pressure in many places – in Beijing in January a key grouping of Christian intellectuals was raided by the police twice. In 2005 nearly 2,000 house-church pastors and members were arrested, according to reliable information published by the China Aid Association led by Bob Fu, a former Beijing house-church leader now based in the States (Lambert, Tony 2006, Email ‘Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN30336)’, 12 July – Attachment 9).

According to the US based religious rights group, China Aid Association, during the period May 2005 to May 2006, “at least 1958 Chinese house church pastors and Christians in 15 provinces were arrested”. The report notes that congregants were often mistreated and tortured while in detention and that many others were also fined. The report found that the worst persecution against house churches occurred in Henan and Jilin (‘China Arrests Nearly 2000 Christians in 12 Months, Reports Shows, *BosNewsLife News Center*, 26 June, *Worthy News* website <http://www.worthynews.com/news/worthynews-com-christian-china-arrests-nearly-2000-christians-in-12-months-report-shows/> – Accessed 7 July 2006 – Attachment 7).

According to the US Department of State, leaders of unauthorised groups were sometimes detained in 2005:

Leaders of unauthorized groups were sometimes the target of harassment, interrogation, detention, and physical abuse.

...Protestant house churches and their leaders were subject to a selective crackdown in many areas. Authorities frequently disrupted house church meetings and retreats and detained leaders and church members.

...Detention of “underground” Catholic bishops, priests, and lay leaders who refused to join the government-approved Chinese Patriotic Catholic Church continued during the year (US Department of State 2006, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005 – China*, 8 March, Section 2c – Attachment 8).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

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

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

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/>

European Country of Origin Information Network <http://www.ecoi.net/>

Freedom House <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>

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

Topic Specific Links

Apologetics Index <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/>

Cardinal Kung Foundation <http://www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/>

China Ministries International <http://www.cmi.org.tw/english/engindex.htm>

Christian Monitor <http://www.christianmonitor.org/>

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

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

Committee for Investigation on Persecution of Religion in China

<http://www.china21.org/English/index.htm>

Compass Direct <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/index.php>

Free Church for China <http://www.freechurchforchina.org/>

Holy Spirit Study Centre <http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/>

Human Rights in China <http://www.hrichina.org/public/index>

International Christian Concern <http://www.persecution.org/newsite/index.php>

International Christian Response <http://www.christianresponse.org/?c=China>

International Coalition for Religious Freedom <http://www.religiousfreedom.com/>

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

Laogai Research Foundation <http://www.laogai.org/news/index.php>

Voice of the Martyrs Australia <http://www.persecution.com.au/>

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

Zenit News Agency <http://www.zenit.org/english/>

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. RRT Country Research 2006, Email to Tony Lambert 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN30336)', 10 July.
2. RRT Country Research 2006, Research Response CHN30207, 14 June.)
3. RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response CHN17561*, 7 October.
4. Kindopp, Jason 2004, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State*, 16 May. (RRT Library)
5. RRT Country Research 2006, Email to Tony Lambert 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN30336)', 11 July.
6. Anderson, Stephen E & Lambert, Tony (ed.) 2006, 'House-Church Networks – An Overview (Part 1)', Cogitations Blog, 26 March.
(<http://cogitations.typepad.com/cogitations/2006/03/index.html> – Accessed 7 July 2006)
7. 'China Arrests Nearly 2000 Christians in 12 Months, Reports Shows, *BosNewsLife News Center*, 26 June, *Worthy News* website. (<http://www.worthynews.com/news/worthynews-com-christian-china-arrests-nearly-2000-christians-in-12-months-report-shows-/> – Accessed 7 July 2006)
8. US Department of State 2006, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005 – China*, 8 March.
9. Lambert, Tony 2006, Email 'Request for assistance from Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney Australia (RRT ref: CHN30336)', 12 July.