

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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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. Is there any evidence from Yunnan province of members of evangelical churches and other churches who are not associated with a registered church facing adverse treatment?**
- 2. Is there any evidence from Yunnan province of pastors/lay preachers who are members of evangelical churches or other churches who are not registered facing adverse treatment?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Is there any evidence from Yunnan province of members of evangelical churches and other churches who are not associated with a registered church facing adverse treatment?**

Little information was found in the sources consulted on the treatment of members of evangelical and other unregistered churches in Yunnan. There are some articles, particularly from China Aid Association¹ (CAA), reporting arrests in Yunnan over the past four years; one article mentioned that police appeared to be targeting those members associating with foreigners.

The US Department of State has reported that there is great variation in how local authorities deal with unregistered religious groups and local officials have great discretion in determining if house churches violate regulations (US Department of State 2006, 'Restrictions on Religious Freedom' in *International Religious Freedom Report 2006 – China*, 15 September – Attachment 2).

¹ The China Aid Association is a Christian organisation, based in the USA, exploring religious freedom in China, particularly the unofficial church ('China Aid Mission Statement' (undated), China Aid Association website http://www.chinaaid.org/english_site/mission.php - Accessed 20 February 2007 – Attachment 1).

A 2000 source cited by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada stated that Protestantism in China is predominantly a rural phenomenon, the greatest concentration of Protestants were in the coastal and central provinces, particularly Yunnan, Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu and Zhejiang (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, CHN33638.EX – *China: Protestants and Protestantism in China; treatment of Protestants; relations between the registered Three Patriotic Self Movement (TPSM) churches and unregistered churches; differences between Protestant forms of worship in China and elsewhere; differences in practice between the TPSM churches and house churches; beliefs, practices, holidays and ceremonies; update to CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999 regarding Christians in Fujian province*, 3 February, p.2 – Attachment 3).

Tony Lambert writes that a 2004 estimate of 1,179,000 Protestants (of a total population of 43 million) in Yunnan Province given by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the state-approved Protestant religious organisation, appears to be credible. In 2003 there were 2,200 registered churches and over 1,000 registered meeting places. In 2005, however, there were only eight registered pastors in the province. The pastors were helped by over 640 elders and over 1,300 voluntary church workers. Approximately 73% of Christians in Yunnan belong to the national minority tribal groups, 27% are Han Chinese (Lambert, Tony 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, p.275 – Attachment 4).

The CAA reported the following actions taken in 2004 against members of unregistered church members in Yunnan.

According to the CAA, in February 2004 police disguised as sanitation inspectors went to an underground Bible training school in Kunming. However, the teachers and students left the building without being arrested. A month later the leader of the Bible training school asked a former co-worker, Zuoting Chen, to check and retrieve belongings left behind by the students. Chen was arrested on entering the building on 21 March 2004 and charged with “endangering the interest of the nation”. That night police reportedly raided his residence. Chen was detained for a month and released on parole on 20 April 2004 (‘Stories about Persecuted Christians in China’ 2004, China Aid Association website, 11 June <http://www.chinaaid.org/english/stories/3.htm> – Accessed 19 February 2007 – Attachment 5).

The CAA also reported that Chen, during interrogation, was shown photographs of foreigners. Chen stated “that foreigners were clearly the target of police efforts” (‘Stories about Persecuted Christians in China’ 2004, China Aid Association website, 11 June <http://www.chinaaid.org/english/stories/3.htm> – Accessed 19 February 2007 – Attachment 5).

The CAA continued that Chen’s wife had become a target. On 14 May 2004 police came to the Chen’s house church meeting to arrest her, however, she escaped. The Chen family’s house church suspended their meetings because of police threats (‘Stories about Persecuted Christians in China’ 2004, China Aid Association website, 11 June <http://www.chinaaid.org/english/stories/3.htm> – Accessed 19 February 2007 – Attachment 5).

The same CAA article reported on “a dedicated Christian couple with a missionary heart for the Wa minority people” in a remote area of Yunnan. They attended a local house church and occasionally preached. In May 2004 they were accused of “engaging in illegal religious activities” and the husband detained for 25 days. He was taken by police to his hometown in Henan and imprisoned there. His family was also said to have been forced to move (‘Stories

about Persecuted Christians in China' 2004, China Aid Association website, 11 June <http://www.chinaaid.org/english/stories/3.htm> – Accessed 19 February 2007 – Attachment 5).

Other sources reported incidents in 2003 against members of unregistered church members in Yunnan.

The US State Department wrote that, in June 2003, 12 Christians in Funing County, Yunnan province, were detained for 15-20 days for disturbing social order when they reportedly tried to register their underground church with local officials (US Department of State 2003, 'Abuses of Religious Freedom' in *International Religious Freedom Report 2003 – China*, 18 December – Attachment 6).

A June 2003 article reported that eight members of an underground Christian church in Yunnan were reportedly charged with violating laws against cults. According to the article Human Rights in China had stated that the arrests were part of a crackdown on unauthorised worship ('Eight Chinese Christians arrested in Yunnan Province – Hong Kong Radio' 2003, *BBC Monitoring Service*, source: Radio TV Hong Kong, 19 June – Attachment 7).

2. Is there any evidence from Yunnan province of pastors/lay preachers who are members of evangelical churches or other churches who are not registered facing adverse treatment?

Little information was found in the sources consulted on the treatment of pastors/lay preachers of house churches in Yunnan province. The CAA reported the arrest, in 2006, of underground church leaders who were attending a meeting with foreign Christian leaders in Kunming and the beating of missionaries in Mengla County.

The CAA in its annual report for the year 2006 referred to the situation of house churches in Yunnan. The report noted that meetings between house church leaders and visiting Protestants to China were disrupted in Henan, Yunan and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. The CAA also mentioned that the information in its annual report was not complete due to the difficulty of obtaining details. (China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province: From January 2006 to December 2006*, January, pp.4-5,19 – Attachment 8).

The CAA reported the arrest of underground church leaders who were meeting with foreign Christian church leaders in Kunming in March 2006. In its annual report the CAA stated that 85 people were arrested. An earlier CAA report stated that 80 Chinese house church leaders, from 20 provinces, had been arrested at the meeting in addition to five Americans and two Taiwanese being interrogated for five hours (China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province: From January 2006 to December 2006*, January, p.5-6,11 – Attachment 8; 'Massive Arrest of Church Leaders including Americans in Yunnan Province; CAA Issues Heartbreaking True Stories on Persecution inside China', 2006, China Aid Association website, 19 April http://www.chinaaid.org/english_site/press_release_detail.php?id=266 – Accessed 27 April 2006 – Attachment 9; 'China detains 1,300 Chinese Christians, 17 foreign missionaries: rights group' 2006, *Agence France Presse*, 20 April – Attachment 10).

The CAA annual report also stated that, on 24 July 2006, 4 missionaries were beaten by police in Mengla County (China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of*

Chinese House Churches by Province: From January 2006 to December 2006, January, p.11 – Attachment 8).

In the report no statistics were provided for Yunnan concerning “detentions” (for over ten days) and “imprisonments” (for more than a year) (China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province: From January 2006 to December 2006*, January, p.3,11 – Attachment 8).

It is of interest that an October 2005 *Asia News* article stated that a full-time house church evangelist, Ma Shulei, had been working in Yunnan. However, he was arrested in Henan on a visit to his pastor father by authorities. Ma Shulei and his father had reportedly been previously detained for more than 40 days in Beijing in 2002 (‘Henan, authorities arrest Christian evangelist and his father’ 2005, *Asia News*, 5 October <http://www.asianews.it/view.php?l=en&art=4270> – Accessed 6 October 2005 – Attachment 11).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

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

Google scholar <http://scholar.google.com/>

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. 'China Aid Mission Statement' (undated), China Aid Association website http://www.chinaaid.org/english_site/mission.php - Accessed 20 February 2007.
2. US Department of State 2006, 'Restrictions on Religious Freedom' in *International Religious Freedom Report 2006 – China*, 15 September.
3. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, CHN33638.EX – China: *Protestants and Protestantism in China; treatment of Protestants; relations between the registered Three Patriotic Self Movement (TPSM) churches and unregistered churches; differences between Protestant forms of worship in China and elsewhere; differences in practice between the TPSM churches and house churches; beliefs, practices, holidays and ceremonies; update to CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999 regarding Christians in Fujian province*, 3 February. (REFINFO)
4. Lambert, Tony 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, p.275. (MRT-RRT Library;
5. 'Stories about Persecuted Christians in China' 2004, China Aid Association website, 11 June <http://www.chinaaid.org/english/stories/3.htm> – Accessed 19 February 2007.
6. US Department of State 2003, 'Abuses of Religious Freedom' in *International Religious Freedom Report 2003 – China*, 18 December.
7. 'Eight Chinese Christians arrested in Yunnan Province – Hong Kong Radio' 2003, *BBC Monitoring Service*, source: Radio TV Hong Kong, 19 June. (CISNET China CX80720)
8. China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province: From January 2006 to December 2006*, January.
9. 'Massive Arrest of Church Leaders including Americans in Yunnan Province; CAA Issues Heartbreaking True Stories on Persecution inside China', 2006, China Aid Association website, 19 April http://www.chinaaid.org/english_site/press_release_detail.php?id=266 – Accessed 27 April 2006. (CISNET China CX152132)
10. 'China detains 1,300 Chinese Christians, 17 foreign missionaries: rights group' 2006, *Agence France Presse*, 20 April. (FACTIVA)
11. 'Henan, authorities arrest Christian evangelist and his father' 2005, *Asia News*, 5 October <http://www.asianews.it/view.php?l=en&art=4270> – Accessed 6 October 2005. (CISNET China CX136489)