

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: CHN31653
Country: China
Date: 16 April 2007

Keywords: China – Underground Christians – Tianjin

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 recommend the best article on what degree of freedom/tolerance of religion is allowed Christians in China in 2007.**
- 2. Current information on the treatment of underground Christians in Tianjin.**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please recommend the best article on what degree of freedom/tolerance of religion is allowed Christians in China in 2007.**

The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China's *Annual Report 2006* provides useful information on freedom of religion in China. Pages 75 to 78 provide the Commission's findings on freedom of religion in China. Pages 79 to 82 provide information on freedom of religion in China with reference to the Chinese Constitution and other regulatory framework including *Regulation on Religious Affairs*. Pages 86 to 89 provide information on religious freedom for China's Catholics and China-Holy See Relations. Pages 91 to 92 provide information on religious freedom for China's Orthodox Christians. Pages 92 to 95 provide information on religious freedom for China's Protestants (US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2006, *Annual Report 2006*, 20 September, pp.75-82, 86-89 & 91-95 – [Attachment 1](#)).

The US Department of State's, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2006 - China* also provides information regarding the current status of religious freedom in China. It includes information regarding government policy, restrictions and abuses of religious freedom in China. It also contains information regarding underground and unregistered Christians including the reasons for their refusal to register or affiliate with state sponsored churches and their treatment by Chinese authorities (US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2006 – China*, 15 September – Attachment 2).

2. Current information on the treatment of underground Christians in Tianjin.

Sources indicate that underground Christians are present in Tianjin. Small house churches and unregistered Catholic churches are reported to exist and operate underground within the Tianjin municipality. Information on the treatment of these underground Christians in Tianjin however, is scarce. Sources have described Tianjin as a “tightly controlled area” for Christians. Instances involving the persecution of house church practitioners reported to have occurred in Tianjin in 2002 as part of a wider Government crackdown on house churches. Sources have also reported the banishing of an underground Catholic Bishop from Tianjin. No recent general information was found in the sources consulted however, regarding the treatment of underground Christians in Tianjin.

Tony Lambert in *China's Christian Millions* offers a brief description of Christian growth in the “tightly controlled” Municipality of Tianjin. According to Lambert small underground house churches exist in Tianjin:

Tianjin Municipality

Details of the Church in this large northern port city are difficult to obtain. It is tightly controlled, and does not appear to have seen any great church growth. House churches exist but are small and operate underground... In late 2003 Christian Communications in Hong Kong estimated there were between 25,000 – 40,000 believers (both registered and unregistered) in the city (Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, p.272 – Attachment 3).

A Christian source has also described Tianjin as “tightly controlled”:

TIANJIN MUNICIPALITY

RELIGION

Muslim 1.8%. Christian 2.3%: All Catholics 1.7%, house churches 0.4%, TSPM 0.2%.

CHALLENGES FOR PRAYER

The Church is almost as tightly controlled as in nearby Beijing, and church growth has been more limited. Catholics have fared better. Pray for an easing of the harsh restrictions and for more church growth (‘China’ (undated), Global Mapping International website <http://www.gmi.org/ow/country/chna/owtext.html#state26> – Accessed 13 April 2007 – Attachment 4).

House Churches

Sources state that in 2002 the Chinese Government conducted a sweeping attack against illegally operating house churches. This resulted in a “harsh crackdown” in Tianjin city. Sources claim this involved the detention and torture of Christian practitioners in Tianjin:

Within the last two weeks (late August, 2002), we received four batches of information about the Chinese Government's crackdown on house churches during its preparation for the coming 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. According to the testimonies we just received, 182 house church members in 24 cities and 16 counties of 10 provinces were either openly arrested, secretly arrested, or kidnapped (missing) during June-August, 2002. Most of them were then detained, interrogated, tortured, and fined. Many meeting places were completely destroyed, and other church properties confiscated... It is also very surprising to see Zhejiang Province and Tianjing City which used to appear open and mild toward religion believers executed harsh crackdown this time. All evidences demonstrate one fact which is the crackdown on house churches is not a local issue but a national campaign, and there is no true religious freedom in China.

...Case 10.

At the early morning about 5:00 a.m. of July 8th, 2002, when she was about to rest after watering the field for the whole night, Sister **Honghua Zhou's** (39-year old) house (at Xiazhuang Village, Chutouling Town, Ji County, Tianjing City) was broken into by five to six plain clothed police led by **Liang Li** (male, 48-year old), Head of the village's Security and Protection Section. They ransacked the house immediately after they confirmed that was **Honghua Zhou's** home. When they found some religious books from the west room, they dragged Honghua Zhou into the vehicle and took her to the town police precinct. Having arrived, she saw some believers from other village were also arrested to the precinct.

At 7:00 p.m. in the evening, **Honghua Zhou** was transferred to the detention house of Ji County. She was detained there for 15 days and fined for 150 RMB (about \$19). She was released after they put her head image, all finger prints and social I.D. number into the computer. She was told that they would come again if anything happened. She has been monitored since then.

Case 11.

About 9:00 a.m. of July 8th, 2002, Brother **Long Mu** (51-year old, church leader, Shangyuan Village, Luozhuangzi Town, Ji County, Tianjing Province) went to the business fair at Shijiajing Village, Luozhuangzi Town. He was taken to the police precinct of Luozhuangzi Town by a plain clothed police right after he got off the bus. After Brother Mu's identification was confirmed, **Cheng Jing** (male, about 40-year old), the associate director of the precinct led three police together with **Long Mu** went to his home.

Once arrived, they went into the west room and ransacked it. They ordered **Long Mu** open every closet and trunk, and searched every corner. Finding nothing, they went to the east room, where they found a CD player and some CDs from a trunk. Then they ran into the backyard and continued their search. They threw things all around. The whole house was turned into a mess like being robbed. Standing aside, **Long Mu** watched helplessly what was going on. They slapped his face every time when they found a religious book or something that praised the Lord. His face swelled immediately. Finally they brought **Long Mu** and the confiscated items (some religious books, some CDs and one CD player) back to the police precinct.

At the night, there were five police guarded **Long Mu**. Four of them were playing cards while one took turn to sleep. But **Long Mu** was not allowed to sleep. They used the cards to slash his face when he fell asleep, then forced him to pick up the cards. In such a way, they tortured him until the next morning.

At 9:00 a.m. **Zhiyun Wang** (male, 48-year old), director of the precinct questioned **Long Mu** who was his upper leader. **Long Mu** said he did not know. Then they used various ways to torture him such as using a piece of bamboo to hit his palm until five o'clock in the afternoon. Then they sent **Long Mu** to QiliFeng Detention House of Ji County, and said to the detention house police, "Here is one more. You should not 'beat him really', but do your best to 'help' him." The other police replied, "Do not worry. We know what to do!" Then they took **Long Mu** to Cell 303, and talked to the cell head for a while. The cell head then said to the other prisoners, "Go. Do your best to 'help' him." Since then, every day, the prisoners beat **Long Mu** with fists, and whipped him with belts, in addition to kicking. They forced him to deny the beating after they finished beating him, otherwise he would suffer more beating. In such a way, **Long Mu** endured a week.

In the morning of July 24th, **Long Mu** was released after being fined for 100 RMB (about \$12). His body was bruised everywhere. His back and legs hurt a lot, and he could not move

easily.

Case 12.

On July 8, 2002, about 5 o'clock in the morning, **Cui-ting Hu** (female, 32-year old), a Christian living at Linhe Village, Mashenqiao Township, Ji County in Tianjin City, was woken up from her dream by hasty knocks on the door. When she opened the door, seven or eight policemen rushed in. After her identity was confirmed, she was ordered to unlock all closets. They searched her place thoroughly. Within several minutes her east room and west room were in a big mess. They didn't find anything interesting. Then Cui-ting Hu was taken to Mashenqiao Township Police Station.

Once in the station, **Cui-ting Hu** was interrogated for four hours nonstop by deputy station chief **Shuai Cai** (male, 32-year old) and his subordinates. They didn't stop until **Cui-ting Hu** fainted and fell onto the ground because of hypoglycemia. They released her when they saw her mouth was full of saliva.

Several days later, the police station sent a village cadre to pass words to **Cui-ting Hu**, ordering her to give up her faith, and warning her that her disease saved her this time. Next time she would be sentenced to prison even she dies, because her faith is a political crime. **Cui-ting Hu** has been under surveillance since then ('House Church Christians Arrested Again Over Mainland China During the Government's Preparation for the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party – Churches Destroyed by the Police Using Force' 2002, Committee for Investigation on Persecution of Religion in China, 19 August – [Attachment 5](#)).

Underground Catholics

Limited reports were found in the sources consulted regarding the treatment of underground Catholics in Tianjin. An article dated 2 September 2004 in *The South Morning Post* reports on the official and unofficial Catholic parish that exists at St Joseph's Cathedral in Tianjin:

The extent of this division was illustrated on Good Friday on April 9 this year when 1,000 Catholics attended services in the official St Joseph's Cathedral in Tianjin. At the same time, another 200 underground Catholics held their own liturgy at the Marian Shrine inside the compound, refusing to have anything to do with the official congregation inside the church.

Their leader, Bishop Stephen Li, who was recognised by the state as a priest but not a bishop, was banished to a church in a remote mountain area. An overseas Catholic news service reported the unofficial group had been praying at the shrine for 10 years, and that the government was aware of the situation. "The community inside the church is run by communists," a man told a reporter from the Union of Catholic Asian News, adding that he believed the souls of Catholics who worship inside the church would go to hell. Hundreds of Catholics travelled several hours to the mountain church to celebrate the holiday with Bishop Li (Mooney, Paul 2004, 'Power of prayer; Clergy from Vatican-approved "underground" and state-approved "official" Catholic churches are gradually merging in a trend that worries Beijing', *South China Morning Post*, 2 September – Attachment 6).

Another source also reports on the banishment of underground Catholic Bishop Li Side from Tianjin. Bishop Li Side of Tianjin is listed by a Catholic source as a "prisoner of religious conscience for the underground Roman Catholic church in China". Bishop Li Side was "confined to the top of a mountain under primitive condition" (Cardinal Kung Foundation 2006, 'Prisoners of Religious Conscience for the Underground Roman Catholic Church in China', 15 February <http://www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/prisoners/index.htm> – Accessed 22 December 2006 – Attachment 7).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

<http://www.aidtochurch.org/> Aid to the Church in Need
<http://www.amnesty.org/> Amnesty International
<http://www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/> – Cardinal Kung Foundation
<http://www.chinaforjesus.com/> – China for Jesus
<http://www.nehemia.org/avc/china/chindex.htm> Christian Aid Ministries Nehemia (on China)
<http://www.equip.org/> Christian Research Institute
<http://worthynews.com/persecution.htm> Christian Persecution Page
<http://www.cmi.org.tw/english/engindex.htm> CMI – Christian Missions International
<http://www.freechurchforchina.org/> – Freechurchforchina.org
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion/> Freedom House, Center for Religious Freedom
<http://www.gmi.org/> – Global Mapping International
<http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/> Holy Spirit Study Centre, Hong Kong.
<http://www.hrw.org/asia/china.php> Human Rights Watch documents on China
<http://persecution.org/humanrights/china.html> International Christian Concern
<http://www.religiousfreedom.com/> International Coalition for Religious Freedom
<http://www.china21.org/English/index.htm> – The Committee for the Investigation on Persecution of Religion in China
<http://www.persecution.com.au/> Voice of the Martyrs (Australia)
<http://www.uscirf.gov/> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

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 for 2006 – China*, 15 September.
3. Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford.
4. 'China' (undated), Global Mapping International website
<http://www.gmi.org/ow/country/chna/owtext.html#state26> – Accessed 13 April 2007.
5. 'House Church Christians Arrested Again Over Mainland China During the Government's Preparation for the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party – Churches Destroyed by the Police Using Force' 2002, Committee for Investigation on Persecution of Religion in China, 19 August.
6. Mooney, Paul 2004, 'Power of prayer; Clergy from Vatican-approved "underground" and state-approved "official" Catholic churches are gradually merging in a trend that worries Beijing', *South China Morning Post*, 2 September.
7. Cardinal Kung Foundation 2006, 'Prisoners of Religious Conscience for the Underground Roman Catholic Church in China', 15 February
<http://www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/prisoners/index.htm> – Accessed 22 December 2006