



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

China

China – CHN38064 – Chinese Evangelical
Christian Church in Tel Aviv, Israel

24 January 2011

1. Is there a Chinese Christian Church in Tel Aviv?

There is a Chinese Christian Church in Tel Aviv, Israel. The history and activities of the Church are described in an article published in *Sociology of Religion* in 2009. The author, Barak Kalir of the University of Amsterdam, undertook six months of ethnographic research among Chinese workers in Israel in 2006 and 2007. He also travelled to Fujian Province in China to interview returnees, pastors in evangelical churches and officials in the 'Returned Overseas Chinese Federation of Fujian Province'.¹

Kalir's article states that the Church is called the 'Chinese Christian Association', and was established in 1998 by Li Dao. The church is evangelical, non-denominational and non-charismatic (i.e. the style of worship is not like other non-denominational churches that observe practices such as speaking in tongues, miracle healings etc.).²

It may be of note that Kalir observes that the Church conducts activities, including sermons and baptisms, on Saturdays (the Israeli official day of rest), as opposed to Sunday.³ Kalir's article does not, however, explicitly state that no Church activities occur on Sunday.

2. If so where is it located?

No specific address was located for the evangelical Chinese Christian Church in Tel Aviv. The journal article published in *Sociology of Religion* was the only source located that refers to the Church's existence, and it notes only that it is located 'in the poor neighbourhood of south Tel Aviv' which is 'a migrant enclave for both legal and illegal migrants from many countries around the world'.⁴

¹ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, pp.130-156 - Attachment 1

² Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, pp.131, 139-140 - Attachment 1

³ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, pp. 130 & 140 - Attachment 1

⁴ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, p.130 - Attachment 1

Kalir notes that while Israel does not have a Chinatown comparable in size and history to those that have formed in other countries:

...the formation of a **Chinese zone in Tel Aviv** is evident and rather impressive in its magnitude, given that Chinese Migrants started reaching Israel only 13 years ago. A walk in **the main pedestrian street in the labour migrants' enclave in south Tel Aviv** divulges several shops that import and sell Chinese products... The street is also full of flashy posters in Chinese advertising money transfers and cheap calling cards, along with improvised ads in Chinese handwriting offering Chinese films, music, medicine, and so on... Some apartments in this area have been converted by groups of Chinese migrants into informal gambling houses where some Chinese migrants spend their weekends playing cards and mah-jong.

...At weekends and on holidays **this embryonic Chinatown** is visited by hundreds and even thousands of Chinese people from all over Israel, who, either individually or in groups, choose to do their shopping and spend their free time in the area... **many Chinese migrants who work in construction sites in and around Tel Aviv live in this area of south Tel Aviv in rented apartments...**⁵

3. If so, was it there between October 2001 – October 2003?

The Chinese Christian Church in Tel Aviv was established in 1998, and was still operating in 2009.⁶ Kalir notes that the Church's peak years in terms of congregation size were between 2001 and 2003, during which the Church had approximately 400 registered members.⁷

4. If so, is there any information available about the names of the Priests at the Church at the time?

The Church was founded by Li Dao, an ethnic Chinese from Vietnam who received political asylum in Israel. Li took on the role of pastor in 1993 for a small group of ethnic Chinese who practiced evangelism, and later opened the Church with himself as pastor in 1998.⁸

Pastor Li administers the Church with his wife and daughters and two ethnic Chinese couples, one from Hong Kong and the other from Taiwan. Kalir notes in his journal article on the Church that 'the more veteran members from among the migrant workers sometimes join the personnel in an organisational or pastoral capacity'. Kalir uses 'the

⁵ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, p.137 - Attachment 1

⁶ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, pp.130-156 - Attachment 1

⁷ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, p.140 - Attachment 1

⁸ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, p.139 - Attachment 1

pastors' in his journal article to refer to Pastor Li 'and any of the Church personnel who preach to members from the pulpit'.⁹ No other Church personnel are named.

5. Deleted.

Additional Information of Note

Chinese Migrant Workers in Israel

Israel only began engaging non-Jewish migrant workers from 1993. Chinese migrants have been recruited since 1995, to work mainly in construction work (around 90 per cent).¹⁰

Migrant workers are not permitted to bring their families to Israel and cannot receive residency. Work visas are limited to a maximum of five years.¹¹

Conversion to Christianity in Israel

Kalir notes that the majority of Chinese who join the Church in Tel Aviv do not come from a Christian background, so 'their membership is coupled with a process of conversion to Christianity.'¹²

Church Activities in Tel Aviv

Kalir observed church personnel actively evangelising among Chinese workers, noting that they occasionally visit Chinese worker residential sites and conduct activities such as reading the Bible in public, telling the workers about Jesus, and inviting them to attend the Church.¹³

Religious observance upon return to China

Kalir's research among Chinese who had converted to Christianity in Israel and returned to China found that the majority did not join authorised (state-sanctioned) churches upon their return. Most choose to become members of underground house churches.¹⁴

⁹ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, p.139 - Attachment 1

¹⁰ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, p.133 - Attachment 1

¹¹ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, pp.135-6 - Attachment 1

¹² Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, p.140 - Attachment 1

¹³ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, p.140 - Attachment 1

¹⁴ Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Journals online, Vol 70, No. 2, pp.148-149 - Attachment 1

Attachments

1. Kalir, B. 2009, 'Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to china: chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity', *Sociology of Religion*, Vol 70, No. 2, pp.130-156. Accessed via Oxford Journals online 19 January 2011.