

**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. Could you please provide details about the beliefs and practices of Padstow Chinese Congregational Church?**
- 2. Does it have links, or follow the same beliefs and practices as a particular underground church in China?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Could you please provide details about the beliefs and practices of Padstow Chinese Congregational Church?**

The Padstow Chinese Congregational Church is part of the Fellowship of Congregational Churches, Australia (FCC). Congregational churches are “independent” evangelical Protestant Christian churches. Congregational Christians believe strongly in the “autonomy of each local church under Christ’s Lordship, and freedom from all external ecclesiastical control”. The FCC “is a warm family of Congregational Christians with a firm Biblical base, a strong evangelical commitment, and a keen optimism for the spread of the Lord’s work across Australia and around the world” (‘Who We Are’ (undated), Fellowship of Congregational Churches website <http://www.fcc-cong.org/whoweare.asp> – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 1; for more information on Independent (Congregational) Churches, see: Ward, R. & Humphreys, R. 1995, *Religious Bodies in Australia, A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed, New Melbourne Press, Wantirna, pp. 112-117 – Attachment 13).

The following information is taken from the Padstow Chinese Congregational Church website and the Fellowship of Congregational Churches, Australia (FCC) website.

The website of the Padstow Chinese Congregational Church is <http://padstowchinesecong.org/>. According to information found on this website, the church conducts Sunday services in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. It also conducts youth groups, various ministries, prayer meetings, bible study groups, and more. A “Statement of Faith” found on the website provides information on the Church’s beliefs, and is included here as Attachment 2. Contact details for the Church Minister, Reverend Dominic Ku, are also included on the website (‘Statement of Faith’ (undated), Padstow Chinese Congregational Church website <http://padstowchinesecong.org/aboutus/statementoffaith.htm> – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 2; ‘Contact Us’ (undated), Padstow Chinese Congregational Church website <http://padstowchinesecong.org/index.htm> – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 3).

Under the heading “Our Vision”, the website states:

To Build, To Grow, and To Go

“To Build” is to **BUILD** up God’s people. It is to make disciple for our Lord. The purpose of building up a life is that this life may **GROW**. The goal of growing up is to **GO**. So that, God’s people may go and to build up more lives, and to make more disciple for our Lord...This is a continuous mission, until our Lord comes (‘Our Vision’ (undated), Padstow Chinese Congregational Church website http://padstowchinesecong.org/aboutus/our_vision.htm – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 4).

The Padstow Chinese Congregational Church is part of the Fellowship of Congregational Churches (FCC), Australia. The FCC website is <http://www.fcc-cong.org/>. According to information from this website, Congregational Churches are independent and autonomous. They also have a “strong evangelical commitment, and a keen optimism for the spread of the Lord’s work across Australia and around the world.” The website provides the following information:

When the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches formed the Uniting Church of Australia in 1977, those Congregational churches opting to remain independent linked together to form the Fellowship of Congregational Churches.

...Today the Fellowship of Congregational Churches embraces churches in four states of Australia and is a warm family of Congregational Christians with a firm Biblical base, a strong evangelical commitment, and a keen optimism for the spread of the Lord’s work across Australia and around the world.

Congregational Churches are ‘independent’ churches. Congregationalists believe in the autonomy of the local church. In some denominations, considerable influence is exerted ‘from the top.’ In contrast, many independent churches have no formal ties with other churches and experience little inter-church fellowship. The Fellowship of Congregational Churches provides a ‘middle ground’ between these two extremes. Each local church is autonomous and no denominational authority can interfere in the life of the local church.

...The Fellowship of Congregational Churches seeks to preserve the following:

- The Lordship of Christ over the local church
- The autonomy of each local church under Christ’s Lordship, and freedom from all external ecclesiastical control
- Co-operation between churches of similar faith and order
- Commitment to the principles of our Puritan forefathers:

- Purity of Life
- Purity of Doctrine
- Purity of Worship
- Purity of Church Government ('Who We Are' (undated), Fellowship of Congregational Churches website <http://www.fcc-cong.org/howeare.asp> – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 1).

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2. Does it have links, or follow the same beliefs and practices as a particular underground church in China?

No information was found as to whether the Padstow Chinese Congregational Church has links to any particular underground church in China. According to some reports, the Chinese government restricts contact of unregistered Chinese Protestants with fellow believers abroad. Regarding beliefs and practices, the available information indicates that Congregational Churches are independent and that the autonomy of each local church “under Christ’s Lordship” is an important aspect of Congregational beliefs. Likewise, “underground” churches (or “house churches”) are not registered with the Chinese government, and seek to maintain their independence from the official registered religious groups and to operate outside of government control (for information on government restrictions on contact with overseas Christians, see: China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province – 2006*, China Aid website, January http://chinaaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/2006_persecution_report.pdf – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 5; for information on Congregational Churches, see: Ward, R. & Humphreys, R. 1995, *Religious Bodies in Australia, A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed, New Melbourne Press, Wantirna, pp. 112-117 – Attachment 13; for information on Chinese underground churches, see US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report 2006: China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau)*, 15 September – Attachment 6, and; Tears of the Oppressed 2004, *Brief: Christians in China – For the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Eighth Australia-China Human Rights Dialogue*, October – Attachment 7).

Congregational Churches

Congregational churches are Protestant Christian churches practicing congregationalist church governance, in which each congregation independently and autonomously runs its own affairs. As already quoted above, the FCC website states that “Congregational Churches are ‘independent’ churches. Congregationalists believe in the autonomy of the local church... Each local church is autonomous and no denominational authority can interfere in the life of the local church” (‘Who We Are’ (undated), Fellowship of Congregational Churches website <http://www.fcc-cong.org/howeare.asp> – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 1; also see: ‘Congregational church’ 2007, Wikipedia¹, updated 7 June http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congregational_church – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 8).

As mentioned above, Padstow Chinese Congregational Church is part of the FCC. The FCC is a member of the World Evangelical Congregational Fellowship (WECF). The WECF

¹ Users should be aware that [Wikipedia](#) is a Web-based free-content encyclopaedia which is written collaboratively by volunteers. Country Research recommends that users of Wikipedia familiarise themselves with the regulatory practices which Wikipedia employs as a preventative measure against vandalism, bias and inaccuracy. For more information, see the recommended background reading available in the Wikipedia Topical Information Package.

website is <http://www.wecf-cong.org/>. According to information found on this website, members of the WECF include Congregational Church unions or fellowships from various countries, representing approximately 1,350 congregations, plus mission points and outreaches. Congregational Churches in China are not mentioned on this website ('World Evangelical Congregational Fellowship Members' (undated), World Evangelical Congregational Fellowship website <http://www.wecf-cong.org/members.asp> – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 9).

Underground Churches/ “House” Churches

A 2006 report by the China Aid Association, a non-profit US Christian organisation, provides information on the religious freedom of unofficial Christian groups in China. According to this report, the Chinese government continues to maintain strict control over the state-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), which leads the registered Protestant church in China. The report also states that:

The Chinese government also continues to restrict relationships of unregistered Chinese Protestants with fellow believers abroad, in contravention of international human rights standards. Meetings between house church leaders and Protestants visiting China to conduct theological or organizational trainings were raided in Henan province, Yunnan province, and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Officials have banned some house church leaders from traveling abroad...Senior government officials continue to incite suspicion of overseas Christians by accusing them of religious infiltration intended to weaken China (China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province – 2006*, China Aid website, January http://chinaaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/2006_persecution_report.pdf – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 5).

According to the available information, “underground” or unregistered Protestant churches in China are also known as “house churches”. Wikipedia² provides the following information on Chinese house churches:

Chinese house churches are unregistered Christian churches in the People’s Republic of China, which operate independently of the government-run Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and China Christian Council (CCC) for Protestant groups and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CCPA) and the Chinese Catholic Bishops Council (CCBC) for Catholics. They are also known as the “Underground” Church or the “Unofficial” Church, although this is somewhat of a misnomer as they are collections of unrelated individual churches rather than a single unified church.

... Protestant house churches are indigenous to mainland China and are usually not under foreign control; some groups welcome help from abroad as long as it does not compromise their independence ('Chinese house church' 2007, Wikipedia, updated 29 May http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_house_church – Accessed 12 June 2007 – Attachment 10).

According to the US Department of State report on religious freedom in China, the term “house church” is used to describe both unregistered churches and gatherings in homes or

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businesses of groups of Christians to conduct small, private worship services (US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report 2006: China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau)*, 15 September – Attachment 6).

A report by Tears of the Oppressed, a Christian human rights organisation, states that there are various denominations of “underground” or unregistered Protestant Christians. This report includes the following information on “underground” churches in China:

- Since the Cultural Revolution, the Three Self Patriotic Movement has divided Christians. Because of the Marxist teachings upheld in the State controlled religious bodies, which are in conflict with the traditional teachings of Christianity, many Christians refuse to join the registered churches.
- This has given rise to a network of underground “house churches”. House churches are Christian groups which are not registered with the Chinese Government and which aim to operate outside of government control. Instead of offering their allegiance to the Communist Party, they seek to give their first allegiance to Jesus Christ.
- As house churches are not registered with the government, they cannot legally own property (e.g. church buildings). Instead they meet in homes for worship, bible reading, prayer, teaching and mutual encouragement.
- When their groups outgrow the house they have been meeting in, (usually a maximum of 70 members) they tend to split off into smaller groups and meet in other homes or buildings.
- Today, it is estimated that there are somewhere between 70 and 100 million house church Christians in China. One source suggests an annual Pentecostal and Evangelical growth of 8.8%. These house churches do not have a centralized governing body, although throughout the network there are many churches who work together in partnership (Tears of the Oppressed 2004, *Brief: Christians in China – For the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Eighth Australia-China Human Rights Dialogue*, October, pp. 5-6 – Attachment 7).

Further information can be found in the following research responses:

- *Research Response CHN31081*, dated 18 December 2006, provides information on Christian groups in Fujian Province (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN31081*, 18 December – Attachment 11);
- *Research Response CHN16481*, dated 27 February 2004, provides information on underground churches in China (RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response CHN16481*, 27 February – Attachment 12).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Google search engine <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. 'Who We Are' (undated), Fellowship of Congregational Churches website <http://www.fcc-cong.org/howeare.asp> – Accessed 12 June 2007.
2. 'Statement of Faith' (undated), Padstow Chinese Congregational Church website <http://padstowchinesecong.org/aboutus/statementoffaith.htm> – Accessed 12 June 2007.
3. 'Contact Us' (undated), Padstow Chinese Congregational Church website <http://padstowchinesecong.org/index.htm> – Accessed 12 June 2007.
4. 'Our Vision' (undated), Padstow Chinese Congregational Church website http://padstowchinesecong.org/aboutus/our_vision.htm – Accessed 12 June 2007.
5. China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province – 2006*, China Aid website, January http://chinaaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/2006_persecution_report.pdf – Accessed 12 June 2007.
6. US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report 2006: China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau)*, 15 September.
7. Tears of the Oppressed 2004, *Brief: Christians in China – For the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Eighth Australia-China Human Rights Dialogue*, October.
8. 'Congregational church' 2007, Wikipedia, updated 7 June http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congregational_church – Accessed 12 June 2007.
9. 'World Evangelical Congregational Fellowship Members' (undated), World Evangelical Congregational Fellowship website <http://www.wecf-cong.org/members.asp> – Accessed 12 June 2007.
10. 'Chinese house church' 2007, Wikipedia, updated 29 May http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_house_church – Accessed 12 June 2007.
11. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN31081*, 18 December.
12. RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response CHN16481*, 27 February.
13. Ward, R. & Humphreys, R. 1995, *Religious Bodies in Australia, A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed, New Melbourne Press, Wantirna, pp. 112-117. (RRT Library)