

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

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- 2. In particular, how are “Shouters” regarded?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Is there any information about the treatment of Protestant Christians in Jiaru Village, Sanshan Town, Fuqing City, Fujian?**
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No information was found on the situation or treatment of Protestant Christians or “Shouters” (also referred to here as the Local Church), specific to the village of Jiaru or to the town of Sanshan in Fujian. For a map showing the location of Sanshan Town, see Attachment 1. According to the Nona.net website, Jiaru is 5.1 kilometers from Sanshan town (‘Map of Fuqing’, (undated) Research & Information database – Attachment 1; ‘Sanshan (Fujian, China) & Jiaru’ (undated), Nona.net website, <http://nona.net/features/map/placedetail.1385061/Sanshan/> – Accessed 14 December 2007 – Attachment 2).

Summary

Information presented below focuses on reports on the treatment and situation of Shouters in Fujian province. DFAT has recently (November 2007) stated that as the group is classified as a cult, that it “expects” this to result in enforcement actions but had no evidence of specific actions taken by the authorities. In August 2006 DFAT stated that it was aware of several

reports of raids on Shouter meetings in Fuqing in 2002. In October 2006, an Elder of the “Church in Melbourne” stated that while in some provinces groups were allowed to register and then worship freely, in Fujian this was not the case in that the local churches were regarded as illegal and members were still being arrested there and in Fuqing city. This view is somewhat contradicted by the author Jason Kindopp, who in a 2004 PhD dissertation wrote that Local Churches operate legally in a number of rural counties in Fujian. Kindopp stated that a 4000 person seating capacity church had been built in Fujian’s Longtian district. In August 2005, the executive secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council commented to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada that where arrests have been made on cultic activity by the authorities, Shouters are one group which has been targeted. In 2003, *BBC Monitoring of the South China Morning Post* reported on the sentencing of three Shouter members to re-education through labour and the arrest of thirty one other members in Fujian.

Reports on Shouters in Fujian:

In November 2007, the Country Information Service (CIS) of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) requested information from DFAT on the situation of the “Shouters” Christian group in Fuqing, Fujian. The CIS initiated this request on account of the significant number of applicants claiming Shouter affiliation from this area. The CIS also sought specific information from DFAT on over twenty villages and townships in Fuqing city and Fujian identified in claims by applicants. DFAT could provide no information on activity by Shouters in these villages. DFAT information on this Christian group is limited to the following:

...The post in Beijing made enquiries with contacts to seek information in relation to these questions, but garnered little further information, particularly in relation to the treatment of Shouters beyond advice in CX158808.

... The specificity and political sensitivity of the information sought in reftel has limited post’s ability to provide a detailed response. Reftel sought extremely detailed information about the treatment of a religious group known as the “Shouters”. China is not a place where information of the kind sought is freely available, and seeking out such information would be both politically sensitive and run the risk of placing practitioners at risk. Any responses, therefore, are necessarily based on general impressions and anecdotal evidence.

R.1. The post in Guangzhou has no specific information regarding the enforcement of the prohibition of underground churches in Fujian generally, or in Fuqing in particular. **We understand that the “Shouters” are defined as an “evil cult” and would expect that this would result in enforcement action, but we have no specific information.**

R.2. The post in Guangzhou has no specific information regarding the targeting of religious groups, including the “Shouters”, in Fuqing. In a recent discussion with the US Consul-General in Guangzhou, the post was told that the United States had also received asylum claims from “Shouters” originating from Fujian, including Fuqing. He said these matters were handled by the US Embassy in Beijing and he had no specific information (DIAC Country Information Service 2007, *Country Information Report No. 07/83 – China ‘Shouters’ Christian group and Fujian Province*, (sourced from DFAT advice 28 November 2007), 28 November – Attachment 3). (Cisnet China CX189037)

CX158808 referred to above contains the following information from DFAT provided to the RRT on 3 August 2006:

Q.1. Is baptism an aspect of 'Shouter' religious practice? If so, what form does it take?

A.1. Post conducted searches of English and Chinese-language websites to seek information on this question (for reference, "Shouters" translates as "Huhan pai" in Mandarin). This research shows that baptism is an aspect of Shouter religious practice. Following the preaching of the founder of the Shouter sect, Witness Li (Li Changshou), the sect promotes multiple baptisms of adult adherents (and is criticised for this practice by more orthodox Christians). Reports on the internet say that some followers have undergone hundreds of baptisms.

Q.2. Is there any report of a raid on a Shouter meeting in Fuqing on 28 October 2002?

A.2. Since 1982, China's government has tried to suppress the Shouter sect, which it views as an "evil cult" (as it does Falun Gong). There are some reports on Chinese-language websites of police raids on Shouter meetings and of leaders and practitioners being arrested and punished. **There are several reports of raids on Shouter meetings in Fuqing (as well as in other areas) in 2002 – usually when the raid received some sort of international attention.** Post has no specific information on whether or not a raid took place on a Shouter meeting in Fuqing on 28 October 2002. Activities of the Chinese authorities to suppress this sect would not necessarily be reported.

Comment

4. You should be aware that the Shouters are regarded by mainstream church groups as a heretical sect, and therefore generic references in our previous reporting and open-source material to the treatment of Christians in China should not be assumed to apply automatically to the Shouters (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2006, *DFAT Report 515 – China: RRT Information Request CHN30365*, 4 August – Attachment 4).

In September 2005 the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) examined the situation and the treatment of Protestants in the southern Chinese provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. In it, the IRB refers to the Shouters "evil cult" government status and includes statements on the targeting of Shouters provided by the executive secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council in August 2005:

...In 1995, a circular issued by the State Council and the Communist Party Central Committee labelled a number of Protestant groups "evil cults" and declared them illegal organizations (Chan and Carlson 2005, 14-15). These groups included the **Shouters**, Full-Scope Church, New Testament Church, Eastern Lightning, and Spirit Church (ibid., 15). According to Chan and Carlson, since the 1999 introduction of a resolution banning cults, which targeted Falun Gong, "the government has focused on enforcement on all groups labeled as 'evil cult' organizations" (ibid.). Human rights groups claim that following the 1999 anti-cult resolution, authorities cracked down on more than a dozen evangelical Christian groups (AFP 9 Oct. 2002; see also *SCMP* 9 Jan. 2002). However, one source reported that the authorities' focus on Falun Gong led to an easing in arrests and harassment of unregistered churches in some areas (*U.S. News & World Report* 30 Apr. 2001).

...Human Rights in China (HRIC) commented in 4 August 2005 correspondence to the Research Directorate that the treatment of Christians is poor in southern China, particularly in the rural areas, though the organization could not elaborate, citing a lack of available information. **However, the executive secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council commented that Fujian and Guangdong have "the most liberal policy on religion in China, especially on Christianity" (Executive secretary 1 Sept. 2005a). In his travels, the executive secretary has met with local authorities who, he said, usually tolerate activities**

of unregistered Christian groups (1 Sept. 2005a). While authorities are of a more tolerant nature in rural areas than in urban centres, they would usually take steps to discourage religious activity if it had a link to groups from outside China (Executive secretary 1 Sept. 2005a). The executive secretary stated that he is aware of a number of unregistered churches along with Bible schools, fellowships and even missionaries that have been allowed to operate in the two provinces for years (1 Sept. 2005a). As an example, he cited the case of Pastor Samuel Lamb's unregistered Damajan Church in Guangzhou, which he said has been allowed to hold meetings on a daily basis for 20 years without interference from authorities (1 Sept. 2005a). **In cases where arrests have been made, the executive secretary pointed out that groups such as the Shouters and the Eastern Lighting, which are considered "heretical" by many Christians, have been targeted** (1 Sept. 2005a) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, *CHN100387.E – China: Situation of Protestants and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2001-2005)*, 1 September – Attachment 5).

Several Research Responses completed in 2006 and 2005 sought information on the situation of the Shouters group in Fuqing city and Fujian. *Research Response CHN17561* of October 2005 refers to reports indicating that Fujian is one of the main provinces where Shouter activity is present, and that the earliest record of arrests and harassment of the group date from 1983. This response also quotes news reports on the 2002 arrest of Hong Kong businessmen who were attempting to supply copies of the Recovery Version of the Bible to members of the Local Church in Fujian; and summarises a 2002 article which goes into some detail on the clandestine networks of volunteers distributing religious material and meetings by members in Fujian (see question 3 of RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response CHN17561*, 7 October – Attachment 6).

In October 2006, RRT Country Research contacted Mr Philip Yee, Elder of the "Church in Melbourne" and requested information on the situation of Shouters in Fujian and Fuqing city. Mr Yee indicated that while in some provinces in China members are allowed to worship following registration with the authorities, in others such as Fujian members were still then being arrested as the gatherings are considered illegal by local authorities:

1. As we understand it, the local churches in China are viewed differently in each province. Certain provinces allow the local churches to register with the authorities and once they have done so, they are allowed to worship. However, in other provinces, including Fujian province, the local churches are regarded as illegal gatherings and **members there are still being arrested.**
2. As mentioned above, the local churches in Fujian province are considered as illegal gatherings and as such are not registered.
3. The same situation applies, as far as we understand from speaking to members who come from **Fuqing city**, that the government is still persecuting members of the local church there. As far as we know, there is no Shandong town in Fuqing city.
4. According to our understanding, local churches in China are generally considered as "shouters" by the Chinese government particularly in Fujian province. The local churches would like to be known simply as local churches but this was a designation given by the Chinese government. I would also like to point out again that not only are the local churches considered as "shouters" church, but also some other groups are considered as "shouters". I guess one of the reasons why the Chinese government considered the local churches as "shouters church" is the practice of many members of the local churches to

audibly praise God in their worship and also their carrying out the scriptural practice of calling audibly upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Yee, Philip 2006, 'RE: Request for information from the Refugee Review Tribunal', 18 October – Attachment 7).

Research Response CHN31015 of December 2006 also looked at the situation of the Shouter church groups in Fujian (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN31015*, 8 December – Attachment 8). It quotes extensive information from a 2004 PhD dissertation by Jason Kindopp of George Washington University, including that in some rural counties in Fujian Local Churches operate legally and that a large church complex was recently built in the rural district of Longtian:

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**. **The Local Church in Fujian's rural Longtian district, for example, recently built a massive church complex with a 4,000 person seating capacity and adjoining classrooms for Sunday school**. 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.⁶²³ Indeed, the practice has become sufficiently widespread that observers now refer to the phenomenon as a potential "third wave" of church-state relations, continuing with broader trends toward official relaxation of religious control from the Mao period through the reform era. If realized, such a "wave" would likely seal the fate of the unpopular TSPM, as the vast majority of congregations would undoubtedly opt to register independently with political authorities, rather than coming under the *lianghui*'s auspices (p.466) (Kindopp, Jason 2004, 'The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant sect', in *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party State*, 16 May – Attachment 9).

Question two of *Research Response CHN31015* also examined evidence for the harassment of members across China more generally (question two, pp.5-7, of RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN31015*, 8 December – Attachment 8).

In September 2003, *Research Response CHN16195* refers to a *BBC Monitoring* report on the sentencing of three Shouters members to re-education through labour in Fujian and the arrest of 31 members (RRT Country Research 2003, *Research Response CHN16195*, 29 September – Attachment 10). The source of the report was the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong of 3 September 2003:

Three members of an underground Protestant group have been sentenced to re-education through labour for **allegedly organizing training classes for Christians**, a Hong Kong Christian source said yesterday.

The three men were identified as Chen Ren, Wu Sisheng and Wang Fei – all core members of a group known as the Shouters in **Fujian's Quanzhou city**, the source said. Police raided the training class on 2 June and **arrested 31 members**.

The trio was sentenced on 15 July on the charge of illegal assembly, the source said. Chen and Wu were sentenced to three years and two years respectively. Wang was sentenced to one year. The source said efforts were under way to find out what had happened to the other people who had been arrested.

Under labour re-education, police may send suspects to penal facilities without going through a court of law. News of the latest crackdown could not be confirmed independently with Fujian's police yesterday.

The Christian source suggested the arrests and incarceration might be related to the smuggling of Bibles by the group.

Beijing has branded the Shouter group a cult. However, members of the group dispute the accusation. Overseas Christians generally see the Shouters as a unique Christian group, but do not count them as a cult ('Possible labour camp detentions of Chinese Christian group members reported' 2002, *BBC Monitoring*, source: "Members of Protestant Sect Sent to Labour Camp" Hong Kong newspaper *South China Morning Post*, 3 September), 3 September – Attachment 11).

No other information specific to the Shouters group in Fujian was found. Extensive information on the origins, founders, and practices of the Shouters Christian tradition can be found in *Research Response CHN13854* (RRT Country Research 1999, *Research Response CHN13854*, 17 December – Attachment 12). According the US Department of State police continue to attempt to put an end to Shouter practice, as stated in its most recent report on human rights practices in China:

The authorities continued a general crackdown on groups considered to be "cults." These "cults" included not only Falun Gong and various traditional Chinese meditation and exercise groups (known collectively as qigong groups), but also religious groups that authorities accused of preaching beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrine. Groups that the government labeled cults included Eastern Lightning, the Servants of Three Classes, the **Shouters**, the South China Church, the Association of Disciples, the Full Scope Church, the Spirit Sect, the New Testament Church, the Way of the Goddess of Mercy, the Lord God Sect, the Established King Church, the Unification Church, and the Family of Love. Authorities accused some in these groups of lacking proper theological training, preaching the imminent coming of the apocalypse or holy war, or exploiting the re emergence of religion for personal gain. The government accused the Eastern Lightning group and some other unregistered Christian groups of involvement in violence.

Actions against such groups continued during the year. **Police also continued their efforts to close down the underground evangelical group Shouters, an offshoot of a pre-1949 indigenous Protestant group** (US Department of State 2007, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau) for 2006, 6 March – Attachment 13).

Demolition of Protestant houses churches are reported for Fujian in the past year. A summary of the situation of unregistered Protestant groups across China is contained in Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, available on the website of the Consulate General of the United States – Hong Kong and Macau:

...Conditions for **unregistered Protestant groups** in China remained poor during the last year. According to the State Department, in some regions of China, Protestant groups that refuse to affiliate with the government-sanctioned religious associations, either because of theological differences or political objections, are subject to intimidation, extortion, harassment, detention, as well as the forcible closure of their churches. In the last year, the Chinese government continued to raid house church meetings, fining and detaining pastors and lay leaders. **In the last year, at least 110 Protestant leaders were detained for a period of 10 days or more, with at least 17 of these receiving prison sentences of one or more years.**

In addition, the State Department estimates that “thousands” of house church members were detained for short periods in the last year. **The majority of arrests and detentions occurred in Henan, Zhejiang, and Xinjiang provinces.** In June 2006, Pastor Zhang Rongliang was sentenced to seven and a half years imprisonment on charges of obtaining a false passport. In July 2005, Protestant Pastor Cai Zhuohua and two other relatives were sentenced to three years, two years, and 18 months in prison respectively for “illegal business activities,” stemming from their large-scale publishing of Bibles and Christian literature without government approval. In October 2006, Protestant Pastor Wang Zaiqing was sentenced to two years of imprisonment on similar charges. Observers report that the use of criminal charges to target Protestant leaders is a recent tactic used by Chinese authorities to halt religious activity conducted without government permission. **During the last year, demolition of Protestant churches was reported in Zhejiang, Jilin, Fujian, Anhui, and Inner Mongolia provinces;** churches in the cities of Guangdong and Shandong were forced to close. In July 2006, officials demolished a church under construction in Zhejiang Province and arrested hundreds of its members. Several were beaten during interrogation and forced to pay fines in order to secure their release. In January 2007, eight leaders from this church were sentenced to prison terms ranging from one to three and a half years.

Religious freedom conditions vary by region for unregistered Protestant congregations and, in some parts of the country, unregistered “house churches,” which range in size from a dozen to several hundred members, meet openly and with the full knowledge of local authorities. For example, in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Protestant leaders report that unregistered house churches are able to maintain their activities without interference from authorities. In other provinces, local officials have great discretion in determining whether “house churches” are allowed to exist. **Protestant “house churches” encounter difficulties when their membership grows, when they arrange for the regular use of facilities, or when they forge links with other unregistered groups or with coreligionists overseas.** The Chinese government’s 1997 White Paper on Religion states that it is unnecessary for “small groups of families and friends” who meet in homes to register their activities with the government. Chinese government authorities reiterated this claim during meetings with a delegation of USCIRF Commissioners in Beijing in August 2005. Provincial-level regulations also include language that permits “religious life in the home.” **Within the last year, however, police conducted raids on hundreds of house church gatherings, confiscated literature, detained and questioned participants, and, in some cases, tried and imprisoned house church leaders. Such raids occurred most frequently in Henan and Zhejiang, where the majority of Protestant religious activity occurs, and in Xinjiang, where oppressive policies on religious affairs are more strictly implemented** (U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 2007, ‘Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom – Country Reports: East Asia’, Consulate General of the United States – Hong Kong and Macau website, May http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/uscn_hr_2007050201.html – Accessed 20 December 2007 – Attachment 14).

Further information on the current situation and treatment of Protestants in China may be found in Section 4, pp.6-9 of *Research Response CHN32722* of December 2007 (Research & Information 2007, *Research Response CHN32722*, 17 December – Attachment 15).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

Consulate General of the United States – Hong Kong and Macau website

<http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/>

Topic Specific Links

Nona.net website <http://nona.net/>

Search Engines

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. 'Map of Fuqing', (undated) Research & Information database.
2. "Sanshan (Fujian, China) & Jiaru' (undated), Nona.net website, <http://nona.net/features/map/placedetail.1385061/Sanshan/> – Accessed 14 December 2007.
3. DIAC Country Information Service 2007, *Country Information Report No. 07/83 – China 'Shouters' Christian group and Fujian Province*, (sourced from DFAT advice 28 November 2007), 28 November. (Cisnet China CX189037)
4. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2006, *DFAT Report 515 – China: RRT Information Request CHN30365*, 4 August.
5. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, *CHN100387.E – China: Situation of Protestants and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2001-2005)*, 1 September. (REFINFO).
6. RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response CHN17561*, 7 October.
7. Yee, Philip 2006, 'RE: Request for information from the Refugee Review Tribunal', 18 October.
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9. Kindopp, Jason 2004, 'The Local Church: a Transnational Protestant sect', in *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party State*, 16 May.
10. RRT Country Research 2003, *Research Response CHN16195*, 29 September.
11. 'Possible labour camp detentions of Chinese Christian group members reported' 2002, *BBC Monitoring*, source: "Members of Protestant Sect Sent to Labour Camp" Hong Kong newspaper *South China Morning Post*, 3 September), 3 September.
12. RRT Country Research 1999, *Research Response CHN13854*, 17 December.

13. US Department of State 2007, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau) for 2006, 6 March.
14. U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 2007, 'Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom – Country Reports: East Asia', Consulate General of the United States – Hong Kong and Macau website, May http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/uscn_hr_2007050201.html – Accessed 20 December 2007.
15. Research & Information 2007, *Research Response CHN32722*, 17 December.